from boys to men

The story of the BDF at 30

1977 – 2007

30th Anniversary
1977-2007

Poem dedicated to 15 Botswana soldiers killed at Lesoma on 27 February, 1978

By Albert G. T. K. Malikongwa [Taken from the 'Smell of Cow Dung'

The waters of the Zambezi in convulsions enormous
Flowed, quivering in the briliant sunshine
Quivering to hide the fury of Mosiwathunya
From deeds hedious
That were ever done under the sunshine

For up the foliage green
In the brilliant sunshine of Lesoma, hid
Men dressed in uniform of green, camouflaged
Assembling ammunitions of death,
Ducking for cover in calculated grins.
The thirst for blood and war
Semed to sharpen and grow stronger
Climaxing in the ruthless ambush, to mow
Cutting untimely, the life-stream
Of opur young soldiers in ghastly acts of war.

For us that black thursday when the nation stood in files
When the fifteen coffins arrived and were buried in Gaborone
Amidst weepings, cries, deep mournings
As people rolled on the dust
In anguish and sorrow that shook us
As we mumbled, questioning heaven's anger.
Masire spoke to articulate the nation's anger
The votex of political envents sweeps
Below the feet of the aggressor
Do not take the law onto your own hands
Grieved and provoked as we are
We shall never, never, flex our determination
Or bury our hands in the sands.

We are a nation struggling for survival in peace
A nation united by an intrinsic sense of purpose
Let the aggressors make no mistake.
Let them know that their grip is jittery
Let them knows that no amount of provocations
Or carnage will cow us to submission.
Let them know that these cruel contrivances
Buttressed and thriving on brutality and stubbornnes
Are but their surest way to defeat
Pointers to weaknesses, to perdition
And are clutching to ann illusive dream
For the people of Zimbabwe will shatter that dream.
Let them know that their power o rule
Is shrinking to the dimension of a shadow
And the hopelessness of scampering foe scape goats
In the dark shadows is an illusion.
Let them know that thgeir utopia is darkening
And their robot-lighta are fading
And decades of poloitical illusions
And empty rhetorics or promises,
All these are in shambles
For theirs is a legacy of trembling hopes.

I pontificate for our enemies defeat
I see the storms are gathering near and afar
I see the angry fires of lighting
Gain speed and force near and afar
I see lighting streatching its whiplashes
On the political gods of white Zimbabwe
Distrurbing the sweetness of their political breeze
Twisting their dreams and destinies into a mirage
Lashing the ground, the trees, the stones
To warn the die-hards and sparrows
Of the dangers in their illusive sanctaury
The writing is on the wall
Long live the gallant fifteen,
Long live Botswana
Long live the heroes of Lesoma
Zimbabwe shall be free, believe it or not.

30th Anniversary 1977-2007

from boys to men

The BDF at 30

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Dedicated to
officers and men
who have served
in uniform

Mission

To defend the country and provide for the security of Botswana; participate in external security cooperation activities; contribute in domestic operaions, with the aims of:

- Ensuring national security and stability;
- Protecting the people and their properties
- Protecting the Constitution of Botswana to guarantee the rule of law;
- Defending Botswana's territorial intergrity on land and in the air;
- Preserving Botswana as a free, independent amd sovereign state;
- Aiding civil authorities in domestic support operations;
- Strengthening Botswana's international relations by participating in regional and international security cooperations activities;

Vision

The Botswana Defence Force shall be a professional, modern, and accountable Force contributing to national security through prompt and decisive response to a wide range of both internal and external defence and security related challenges.

Values

Duty

- We recognise our duty to perform with competence and to strive for excellence at all times.
- We accept our responsibilities and the consequences of our actions and we place duty before private or individual aspirations

Descipline

- We vow our respect and support to lawful authority established under the laws and customs of Botswana.
- We bear true allegience to the Country and Constitutional elected Governemnt of the day.

Espirit de corps

- Unity is our strength and power, therefore we dedicate unreserved loyality to team effort and we vow to support each other at all times.

Intergrity

- We honour the trust placed upon us by the people of Botswana and we will always act with uncompromising personal and institutional intergrity at all times. We adhere to high moral and ethical standards in fulfilling our professional obligations.

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The BDF flag

The upper green band represents the traditional military green uniform.

The lower green band represents the bush environment that soldiers are expected to operate in.

The red band represents the blood of members of the BDF that have been, and would be shed and sacrificed in the defence of this nation.

The two white stripes represent peace. The significance of them being on either side of the red band is to indicate the effort of the BDF that will be channelised in containing and preventing bloodshed through deterrence.

The width and direction of all colour bands and stripes is duplication of the **Botswana National Flag** for that purpose.

The **coat of arms** of the BDF occupies a place in the centre of the flag. The inner circle with the letters BDF written upon represents the entire nation, the people, infrastructure, and the country. The lettering **BDF** – represents the organisation's commitment to defend this nation.

The outer ring with the motto, "**Thebe ya Sechaba**," written represents the shield that the BDF casts around the nation for its protection.

The crossed swords represents all types of weapons used to defend the nation.

The national coat of arms that sits on the top of the outer ring represents the authority of the Constitution and the Government over the functions of the BDF.

The Commander-in-Chief

On1 April 1998, Festus Mogae was sworn in as Botswana's third President, upon the retirement of his predecessor Sir Ketumile Masire. In 1999 and again in 2004 he earned renewed mandates when his party, the Botswana Democratic Party, was retained in power with a majority of the vote.

President Mogae was born on 21 August 1939 at Serowe in the Central District of Botswana. He matriculated at Moeng College and went on to train as an Economist at the Universities of Oxford and Sussex in the United Kingdom.

He took up post as Planning Officer in 1968 and progressed to become Director of Economic Affairs. He was Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Finance and Development Planning from 1975 to 1976. He became Alternate Governor for Botswana at the International Monetary Fund, African Development Bank and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development from 1971 to 1976. He served in various parastatal boards, as, Member of the Board for Water Utilities, Botswana Housing Corporation, Botswana Meat Commission, Botswana Meat Commission (United Kingdom) Holdings, ECCO Cold Stores Limited and Allied Meat Importers Limited. He was also Director, then later Chairman, of Botswana Development Corporation, Representative of the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation, Director of the De Beers Botswana Mining Company (Pty) Limited (Diamond Mining Company), Botswana RST Limited, Bangwato Concessions Limited, BCL Sales Limited and Bank of Botswana.

He served in Washington, DC as Alternate Executive and Executive Director, International Monetary Fund for Anglophone Africa from 1976 to 1980. He then came home to take up the position of Governor of the Bank of Botswana from 1980 to 1981. From 1982 to 1989, he was Permanent Secretary to the President, Secretary to the Cabinet and Supervisor of Elections.

He was appointed Minister of Finance and Development Planning in 1989 and became Vice President in 1992, until 31st March, 1998 when he became Third President of the Republic of Botswana. He was Chairman of Southern African Development Community (SADC) Council of Ministers from 1992 until 1996. By virtue of his position as Vice President, he was also Leader of the House for Botswana National Assembly. In 1994, he contested in the general elections and won a seat for the Palapye Constituency. He was an active member of the Botswana Democratic Party and served in various committees of the party including, Member of the Botswana Democratic Party Central Committee and Chairman of its Finance and Economic Committee, and Member of the Central Committee responsible for Letswapo Region from 1992 to 1995.

He was also Member of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Member of the Parliamentarians for Global Action based in New York and the Global Coalition for Africa based in Washington DC.

He was Governor for Botswana for the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Member of the Joint Development Committee of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund on the transfer of real resources to developing countries, Washington DC from 1989 to 1990.

President Festus Gontebanye Mogae (NYB., MCC., PH., MP.)

He is also involved in community oriented Organisations which include Kalahari Conservation Society, Botswana Society (Research Organisation) of which he is President, Lions Club of Palapye, President of the Botswana Society for the Deaf, Patron of the Junior Achievement Botswana as well as Chairman of the National AIDS Council (launched on 30 March, 2000).

He has been awarded the Presidential Order of Honour of Botswana (1989) and the Naledi ya Botswana (September 2003), also the Officier de l'Order Nationale D'e Cote d'Ivoire (1979). l'Order Nationale du Mali and The Knight Commander of the Most Courteous Order of the Kingdom of Lesotho (April 2004).

Other awards include: the HATAB's Award for Outstanding Contribution to Botswana's Tourism Industry (1997). Honorary Degree of Doctor of Laws – University of Botswana (Sept. 1998) the Global Marketplace Award by the Corporate Council on Africa - Houston, USA (May 1999). He was also awarded Honorary Fellowship of the Botswana Institute of Bankers – Gaborone, Botswana (July 1999), the Distinguished Achievement Award for Aids Leadership in Southern Africa by the Medunsa Trust, Washington D.C., USA (June 2000), the Harvard Aids Institute 2001 Aids Leadership Award - Gaborone, Botswana (December, 2001), the 2002 Congressional Black Caucus Annual Legislative Conference Weekend Chairman's Award - Washington D.C. USA (September, 2002) the Africa-America Institute National Leadership Award – New York, USA (September, 2002) the US National Bar Association President's Award for Promoting Democracy and Human Rights (June 2004) and the International Academy of Achievement Golden Plate Award (May 2005).30

Minister of Defence, Justice and Security

Honourable Phandu Tombole Chaha Skelemani, the Minister of Defence, Justice and Security was born in Mapoka on 5th January 1954. Hon Skelemani graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Law from the university of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland, majoring in conveyancer and notary public.

He was the State Counsel from 1973 to 1975. He then became Senior Counsel until 1978. He further became Principal State in 1978 and held the appointment until 1980 when he became the deputy Attorney General.

He went on to become Attorney General in 1992 and held that position until 2003. As Attorney General, he advised the Cabinent and was the Principal Legal Advisor to the Botswana government.

Hon. Skelemani retired from civil service in 2003 when he joined active politics. He contested the Francistown East constituency in 2003 and appointed Minister of Presidential Affairs and Public Administration in 2004. In 2005 Hon. Skelemani was appointed Chairperson of the Defence Council.

During his career in the civil service, Hon. Skelemani participated in a number of international conferences and seminars related to law. Amongst others, he attended conferences on Rule of Law and the Legacy of Conflict, Human Rights Conference in Tunisia and African and Carribbean Leaders Programme in the USA.

He has also led Botswana delegation to several UN conferences in Vienna relating to drugs and international cooperation in criminal matters and has attended Commonwealth Law Ministers Conferences in Harare, Vancouver, Malaysia, Trinidad and Tobago.

Minister Skelemani is married to Kelebone and they have been blessed with a son and two daughters. 30

Hon. Phandu T. C. Skelemani (PH., MP.)

Commander, BDF
Lt. Gen. T. H. C. Masire

Lieutenant General Tebogo Carter Masire is the commander of the Botswana Defence Force. He assumed this position on 1st November 2006 where he was also promoted to the rank of Lieutenant General.

He enlisted with the BDF on the 25th June 1977.He was amongst the first batch of BDF Officer Cadets who did the Basic Military training in Zambia.

Professionally, General Masire is a rated pilot who graduated from Squadron Officer School; USAF in 1984.His massive piloting background includes being a graduate of Air Command and Staff College in the USA in 1988.

Some of his great academic achievement is Associate Degree in Public Administration and Bachelor of Science (Bsc) in Resource Management from Troy University, United States. In addition, he successfully completed Masters Degree in Business Administration (MBA) with the University of Southern Queensland, Australia in 2002.

From 1988 to 1998, he was Air Arm Commander and from 1998, General Masire was Deputy Commander of the BDF.

His decorations include Duty Code Order (DCO), Distinguished Service Medal (DSM) and the Grand Officer Medal (GOM).

Reaching the pinnacle of ones career is one of the most significant occurrences in ones life. It has happened to Lt Gen Masire when he got promoted from the rank of Major General to Lieutenant General and appointed commander of the BDF on the 1st of November 2006.

Lt. Gen Tebogo H. C. Masire (DCO., DSM., GOM.)

Guest of Honour

Lieutenant General Martin Shalli
Chief of Namibia Defence Force

Chief of Namibia Defence Force, Lieutenant General Martin Shalli, joined the liberation struggle for the independence of Namibia in 1974.

The same year, he was sent to the Soviet Union to train as an Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battery Commander. He went back to the Soviet Union in 1982, to train as a Mechanized Infantry Brigade Commander. He has attended the British Command and Staff College, as well as the Royal College of Defence Study.

During his long service in war of liberation, he held various military assignments such as Platoon Commander, Detachment Commander, Secretary to the Military Council of the Peoples Liberation Army of Namibia, Chief of Air Defence (Northern Front), Chief of Staff (North Eastern Front), and Chief of Operations.

At independence in 1990, he joined the new Namibia Defence Force (NDF) as Director of Operations, Plans and Training at the rank of Brigadier General. In 1996, he was made NDF's Chief of Staff, and he was promoted to Major General. He became Army Commander in 2000. Between 2005 and 2006, he was Namibia's High Commissioner to Zambia.

General Shalli's decorations include Order of Eagle 2nd Class, Bravery Medal 1st Class, OmugulugwOmbashe Medal, Namibia Cross for Bravery Silver and NDF Ten Years Service Medal.

Lt. Gen Martin Shalli (GONE., NBCG., NBCS.)

Past BDF Commaders

3 **Lieutenant General L. M. Fisher**
Commander, BDF
DCO., DSM., GSM., USAWC., BA., MPA.
1998 – 2006

2 **Lieutenant General S. K. I. Khama**
Commander, BDF
PH., FOM., DOC., DSM.
1989 – 1998

1 **Lieutenant General M. S. Merafhe**
Commander, BDF
PH., BPM., DSM., FOM., LOM.
1977 – 1989

BDF high command

Maj. Gen. Jefferson Tlhokwane

Major General Jefferson G. Tlhokwane was born in Kang. He completed secondary education in 1971. The following year he enrolled for a B.Sc Part 1 at the then University Of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland were he completed in 1974. He went on to do a Bachelor of Engineering Part 11 at Ahmadu Bello University in Nigeria in 1977. Major General Tlhokwane joined the Botswana Defence Force in February 1978 and has trained both locally and internationally.

Command appointments that he has held include the Deputy Commander/ Air Arm Commander (his current posting), Deputy Chief of Staff - Defence Logistics Command, Deputy Air Arm Commander - Support Services, Deputy Air Arm Commander and Base Commander -Thebephatshwa Air Base, Deputy Air Arm Commander, Chief Engineer - BDF Air Arm, and Licentiate Aircraft Maintenance Engineer - Notwane Air Base.

General Tlhokwane has served as Chief Liaison Officer, United Nations Operations in Mozambique, in 1993 - 1994. He served as Head of SADC Advisory Team in Lesotho in 1999 - 2000. He has served as member of the Authority Board of the Southern African Defence and Security Management Network (SADSEM), Wits University.

Maj. Gen. Pius Mokgware

Major General Pius Mokgware, is Commander - Ground Forces Command. He joined the Botswana Defence Force in 1980 and has trained both locally and internationally.

His academic achievements include Licentiate Member of Institute of Accounts, Bachelor of Business Accounting, and Master of Science (Strategic Studies). General Mokgware has held various appointments including Staff Officer Finance - BDF HQ, Internal Auditor - BDF HQ, and Assistant Chief of Staff - Finance.

He has commanded 2 Infantry Brigade.Subsequent to that, he ascended to command the Ground Forces Command of the BDF in April 2004.

His decorations include Distinguished Code of Order (DCO), and Distinguished Service Medal (DSM).

Maj. Gen. Otisitswe Tiroyamodimo

Major General Otisitswe B. Tiroyamodimo was born in Serowe. He commissioned at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst in the United Kingdom in 1980.

He has held various appointments such as Platoon Commander (Infantry), Adjutant(Infantry Company),Squadron Commander (Special Forces), Battalion Commander, Deputy Brigade Commander, Assistant Chief of Staff Personnel, Assistant Chief of Staff Logistics, Chief of Staff Logistics, as well as Commander, Defence Logistics Command, his current post.

General Tiroyamodimo has also taken part in various international assignments. He was Deputy Region Commander (UN Forces, Mozambique), Advisor to the Commonwealth Peace Keeping Force prior to the first democratic elections in South Africa, Chairman of a UN Panel of Military Experts investigaing the violation of sanctions in Angola, and Senior Military Representative of the African Union to the Military Coordination Commission in Eithopia and Eritrea. 30

A nation with a military history

There is a widespread myth of Botswana as a peaceful haven and Batswana as peace loving to the point of docility. What this view overlooks is that Batswana have had a military culture, which, to quote Sir Seretse Khama, "was just as worth writing and learning about as any other. I say this because in our schools we devote much time to the military history of others, Bismarck, Shaka, the Western Front, but totally neglect the role played by war, both in the pre-colonial and colonial eras in shaping who we are today".

Botswana's boundary with the former Transvaal Province is a product of the Batswana-Boer War of 1852-53 when a combined force of Bangwaketse and Bakwena beat the Afrikaners' Commando into a retreat.

Throughout history, many Batswana chiefs were distinguished military leaders with a deep knowledge of battle tactics. They were generals who led from the front whenever their people came under attack. For instance, during the Batswana-Boer War of 1852-53, Sechele of the Bakwena commanded his army in the battlefield.

Other Dikgosi who distinguished themselves as military leaders include Sebego I, Macheng, Kgari I, Sekgoma I, and Khama III.

Like other Late Iron Age people of Southern Africa, pre-colonial Setswana society had a strong warrior tradition. Thus oral traditions, songs and praise poems celebrate military prowess.

Setswana military culture was probably strengthened by wars of conquest and subjugation against various groups in the 18th Century.

During the 19th Century, local Batswana groups made a remarkably rapid transition from classic late iron-age weapons and tactics to the demands of advanced gun warfare.

During the 20th Century Batswana made significant contributions in Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902, World War I and, most especially, World War II.

Contrary to the Bantu Education mythology found in schools, short stabbing spears (diputlela/segai), as well as the long throwing spears (marumo), were used by Batswana before Zulu warrior/king Shaka. Local shields were neither of the long Amazulu type nor the small four pointed protectors used by Basotho and Batlhaping. Instead they were of medium size and oval shape. In contrast to the white Bangwaketse shields, the Bakwena preferred buffalo skin, while Bangwato used giraffe as well as buffalo.

Notwithstanding its more modern status as a manifestation of royalty, the leopard skin cloak was a standard part of the traditional uniform. The cloaks were worn together with long aprons, covering the chest and loins made from karrosses of other spotted animals. The legs of warriors were adorned with copper wire bangles and beads, while their feet were protected by sandals.

Ostrich feather headdresses were common among most tribes. White feathers were sometimes reserved for those of higher rank. Around their necks the men invariably suspended their charms, medicines, and lucky dice.

Batswana's military served various purposes, mainly hunting of dangerous predators as well as defence against invading armies. The various Batswana groups organised were along age regiments (mephato).

On the footsteps of 10 000 great men

When Britain declared war on Germany in 1939, there was little expectation on the part of either Batswana or the British that the new conflict with the Germans would involve Batswana in more than a peripheral role. But eventually, the success of Adolf Hitler's lightening warfare caused a change of heart.

By June 1940, Britain already stood alone in Europe against Germany, Italy and the smaller Axis states. Batswana were finally called to arms in June 1941, by which time the Germans had driven the British out of Libya and Greece and were threatening the Suez Canal, the very lifeline of the Empire.

When the call to arms finally came, the Batswana's response was overwhelming.

Initially, Batswana as well as Basotho and the Swati were recruited into the imperial army's new unit called the Africa Auxiliary Pioneer Corps (APC). The demeaning term "Auxiliary" was later dropped, in recognition that the African Pioneers performed at the same level as those from Britain and elsewhere in the Empire.

In British military terminology of the time, "Pioneers" or "Sappers" were troops who carried out such functions as the building and rebuilding of bridges, roads and fortifications. Yet, before the war was over, a quarter of the APC's companies were in fact serving as artillerymen, operating 3.7-inch Heavy Anti-Aircraft (HAA) guns. The term "Pioneer", nonetheless, survived for the entire unit until 1946 when the APC was superceded by the short-lived High Commission Territories Corps.

From the beginning, recruitment into the APC was carried out by the Dikgosi. In some of the Tribal Reserves a letsholo meeting was held to formally declare war on Bojeremani and Boitali. Mephato were then called upon to provide a quota of men. Although the most senior mephato were excluded, many who came forward were middle aged. Among

"We must guard against self seeking and greedy leaders of the force who might kill our democracy by starting a coup. The command must be in safe hands," **Englishman Kgabo** [**Kweneng East MP**] discussing the BDF bill in Parliament, **1977**

the Bakwena, the Mathubantwa regiment, which included veterans of the First World War, was given the task of rounding up recruits.

Officially, the APC was an all-volunteer force. But, for most people the word of the Kgosi was law, although a few politicized migrants back from Gauteng are said to have refused. Others avoided service by either hiding or migrating to South Africa, where their labour was in heavy demand to support wartime industries. In Kweneng, such dodgers are still known as "Maseapitse", as in those who ran from the horses. Many others readily went for Kgosi and country. In the postwar years there would be some tension between those who did and did not go.

After signing papers and swearing in before a local District Commissioner, often in the presence of their Kgosi, the recruits were sent to the Pioneer Corps Group Headquarters and Depot (camp) at Lobatse. There they were divided into Companies, units of about 350 men each. In the winter of 1941 seven Companies were formed, which ultimately supplied all of the Batswana HAA gunners. They were 1971 (Bangwaketse), 1972 (Bangwato), 1973 (Bakwena), and 1974 (Bakgatla, Balete, Batlokwa), 1975 (Bangwaketse), 1976 (Bangwato), and 1977 (Bangwato).

Once in uniform, the main activity for the men at Lobatse seems to have been drilling. With guns in short supply, sometimes ancient family weapons were pressed into service. The British officers and NCOs, who arrived via Pretoria to conduct the basic training, soon realized that Batswana were readily able to adapt skills and patterns of teamwork they had in most cases acquired as migrant labourers in South Africa, as well as their own communities, to their new role as soldiers.

In September 1971, 77 Companies left Lobatse for Durban. After a week's wait, they boarded ships bound for Egypt. Some spent a couple weeks enroute, with stopovers in Mombasa, Kenya and Aden, southern Yemen, which involved inland marches. Others aboard the venerable luxury liner S.S. Mauritania took only nine days to reach Suez.

The first Batswana APC troops, the 2500 men of Companies 1971-77, began arriving at Port Suez, Egypt in October 1941.

Once landed, the Batswana companies were taken by lorry to Qasassin, a dusty town some 35 kilometres west of the Suez Canal that was the location of the main Pioneer Corps Depot for the British forces in the Middle East. There the Batswana joined some 20,000 other Pioneers drawn from throughout the Empire.

In addition to the British there were men from such places as Cyprus, Kenya, Malta, Mauritius, Palestine (then divided into separate Arab and Jewish units), Seychelles, Sudan, Tanganyika (Tanzania), Uganda, and Yemen. These units were able to mix freely, but international contact for most of the Batswana was limited by the language barrier. Few then spoke the imperial lingua franca, English.

Upon arrival, each Motswana was issued full battle kit that included fatigues (combat dress), steel helmet, gas mask, and canteen.

For many troops the most prized piece of equipment was their Mannlicher Carcano 6.5 mm assault rifle. These captured Italian guns were substitutes for the modestly higher calibre British Lee Enfield Mark 3 rifle, which were then in short supply.

The Lee Enfield subsequently became the standard armament of Batswana, as well as most British and

Target shooting practice

In the staff canteen

other imperial troops. For the more suspicious Batswana the guns were proof that they, unlike their predecessors in the First World War, were indeed now proper soldiers.

After being equipped, the Batswana were put through a month long crash course of combat training. During shooting practice the lightness, balance and simple sighting mechanism of the Carcano was well appreciated. But the Italian ammunition frustrated many a marksman by failing to fire.

There were also "endurance marches" through the desert. While these tests left most of the Depot's cosmopolitan mix of troops from all corners of the Empire gasping or worse, they do not seem to have been much of a strain for men already seasoned by the rigors the Kgalagadi sandveld.

Having completed the final phase of their basic training, in December 1941 the first companies of Batswana APC troops began leaving the Corps' Depot at Qasassin, Egypt. Six companies, 1971-76, were dispatched to the then French League of Nations mandate territory of Lebanon-Syria, which had been occupied by other units of the British 9th army a few months earlier in fighting against Vichy French forces. Prior to this, the French collaborators had granted landing rights to the German Luftwaffe (Air Force), thus threatening the vital Suez Canal.

Similar considerations had also resulted in the British occupying both Iraq and Iran, then sovereign kingdoms, whose governments were alleged to have come under the control of military officers sympathetic to Nazi Germany. An underlying motive was the fact that the oil from these two countries, and Saudi Arabia, was then vital to Britain's war effort, as well as a potential target for Germany.

Notwithstanding these interventions the British position in the Middle East remained vulnerable throughout 1942. There was in particular the fear of a German invasion of Lebanon-Syria through then neutral Turkey. Such a Blitzkrieg (lightening offensive) would capture the oil fields and doom the Suez, while opening the door to further German drives into Asia and Africa. If the invasion did come the Batswana would be called upon to fight, notwithstanding the APC's initial status as a labour unit.

In the early months of 1942 many of the Batswana were kept busy building and upgrading defences in the Bekaa valley of Lebanon. One of the biggest projects was the construction of a large fortress at Majdaloun.

Others helped establish a rail link from Egypt to the Lebanese capital Beirut via Haifa (Palestine). In addition to hard work, the Batswana had to adjust themselves to a winter environment of snow and icy winds.

Once the defensive infrastructure had been largely completed the Batswana troops were redeployed to undertake garrison duties along the potential invasion route. But the Germans never came.

The original companies, whose ranks now included Dikgosi Kgari Sechele and Molefi Pilane, were eventually transferred back to Egypt, but other Batswana came in their place. By the end of 1942 some 25 Batswana companies, totaling 10,027 men, had been mobilized. Of these all but one spent time in Palestine, Lebanon and/or Syria.

While the first wave of Batswana were stationed in Lebanon, three companies, 1977, 1979, and 1983, were posted along Suez

Canal performing guard duties. A few Batswana were also detached to guard King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia, while he was in Egypt.

Along the Suez, sleep was often interrupted by Luftwaffe night bombing. At one point there was some further excitement when the German commandos launched an unsuccessful paratroop assault in an attempt to sabotage the canal.

Further to the west, heavy fighting was taking place against the German "Desert Fox" Rommel's Afrika Corps. In March 1943 it was decided to shift the experienced Batswana and Basotho companies from the 9th army into frontline combat roles in the British General Montgomery's 8th army.

In January 1943, the veteran APC companies 1971-76 were transferred from Lebanon to the Royal Artillery Base Depot at Almaza, Egypt. There they underwent two months of intensive gunnery training before being assigned to man 3.7-inch Heavy Anti-Aircraft (HAA) batteries.

The 3.7 HAA was known as a notoriously difficult weapon to master. The biggest Anti-Aircraft weapon in the British arsenal, to load, aim and fire one of the massive guns required the close cooperation of half a dozen men.

The calculations required to hit fast flying enemy aircraft were especially complex. Initially this task was left to experienced British gunners. But, to the surprise of many of their superior officers, Batswana soon proved capable of taking over the "no. 1" firing position.

At first many of the British had in fact openly wondered whether the "Becs" should be assigned to HAA duties at all. Most of the Batswana had not been to school and thus had to be given a crash course in mathematics for artillery. But, any initial academic shortcomings were compensated for by superior teamwork and enthusiasm.

In February 1943, Officer in Charge of Middle East Anti-Aircraft Defences, Major General Pollock, came to Almaza to inspect the Batswana target practice. Impressed by their rapid progress, he immediately confirmed their transfer to full combat duties.

Thus, in March, Batswana operating both mobile and static 3.7 HAAs, became the first African gunners assigned to Montgomery's elite 8th Army. Having defeated the German General Rommel's Afrika Corps at El Alamein the previous October, the "Desert Rats" of the 8th Army were then pushing steadily across the sands of the then Italian colony of Libya to link up with American and Free French forces in Tunisia.

In June 1943 Batswana gunners providing air cover for Tripoli, the Libyan capital, were honoured with a royal visit by King George VI. The monarch also met other Batswana then unloading ships and manning stores in Malta, which since 1941 had been subjugated to almost daily bombardment by Axis warplanes. They were thus present when the island's residents were awarded an unprecedented collective Victoria Cross for their bravery under fire.

While some Batswana became gunners, other veteran units specialized in the use of smokescreen machines. Most of the time these "smokers" were expected to blind enemy aircraft from their potential targets.

But, smokescreens were also used in ground fighting to conceal attacking formations. This was an especially dangerous operation requiring units to position themselves between their own and enemy lines. Batswana units carried out both missions with distinction.

On a different note, like the BDF of today, the Batswana military bands also distinguished themselves. According to the Egyptian Mail newspaper of 18 March 1944, the highlight of Empire Day celebrations that year was a championship rugby match between the "All Blacks" and the "Springboks" at the Alamien Club in Cairo.

This match was the culmination of a season of international rugby competition between various teams drawn from the ranks of Commonwealth forces in the Middle East. Most of the Springboks hailed from the 6th South African Air Division while the All Blacks home ground was the New Zealand Base Depot.

Halftime entertainment at the Empire Day final was provided by the popular "Becuana Drum and Bugle Band", whose NCOs were Regimental Sergeant-Major Rasebolai Kgamane and African Pioneer Corps Depot Staff Sergeant Philip Matante.

Italy was where the "10,000 men from Bechuanaland" truly became hardened by the rigours of continuous combat. Their baptism of fire began on 10 July 1943, when the Batswana and Basotho Pioneers of the British 8th Army became the only Africans to take part the allied invasion of the Italian island of Sicily, codenamed "Operation Husky".

The first Batswana ashore were the 1972 Company (Bakwena and Bangwato) of the B troop 209 HAA Battery, who joined other elements of the 8th Army's 73rd Regiment in taking the ancient port city of Syracuse. On the same morning, they were followed by the 1977 (Bangwato) Smoke Company.

Once off the beach, the Bakwena and Bangwato began deploying their smokescreens and 3.7 guns as well as a battery of captured Italian Ansaldo artillery. The landing, itself, had been virtually unopposed as the Italians, who were now beginning to revolt against their

On the 18 April **1977**, President Seretse Khama appointed Mompati Merafhe as the first commander of Botswana Defence Force. From September 1971 Merafhe had served as Deputy Commissioner of the Police

"It is not our intension to provoke anybody. But we are not prepared to tolerate any type of provocation, incursion or repeated aggression into Botswana like those perpetrated by some of our neighbours in the north," – **Major General Mompati Merafhe** – 22 April **1977**

On 01 May **1977**, **Ian Khama** was elevated to the rank of Brigadier, **B. Mpala** and **S. Molemogi** were prompted to the rank of Major, while **P. Motang**, **M. Malesu** and **L. Makolo** were elevated to the rank of Captain

Fascist regime, generally decided not to resist.

Unfortunately, part of the German 10th Army was also garrisoned on the island. The German counterpunch gathered force on July 14 with the belated arrival of Luftwaffe (German Air Force) heavy bombers into the conflict.

The primary target of the German aircraft was the shipping and docking facilities at Syracuse, which was then the primary supply line for the allied forces on the island. Over the next two weeks men of 1972 Company distinguished themselves by shooting down 11 enemy planes, about half of the total downed over Syracuse. As the 8th Army pushed northward towards Messina the HAA units, for apparently the first time, began to also successfully use their 3.7 guns in field firing against German ground forces around Cantina.

By mid July other Batswana units had also landed: 1967 (Bangwato), 1968 (Bangwato), 1969 (Bakwena), 1970 (Bangwaketse), 1979 (Bangwato), 1983 (Bangwaketse) and 1990 (Bangwato).

On August 11, the 1967 Company came under concentrated aerial attack at Lentini airfield. Heretofore, the Batswana had miraculously suffered only two wounded during the entire invasion. But at Lentini five were killed and 26 wounded when a formation of 30 enemy planes swept down with anti-personnel bombs.

The Lentini raid was the worst single attack suffered by Batswana during the war. Five Batswana Pioneers were subsequently commended for their unfailing courage during the raid. Their names (as recorded) were: Sergeants Otukile and Petoro, Corporals Phatsimo and Ditogile and Private Ntshonyalo. The last was among those who had fallen.

The July 1943 Anglo-American led United Nations invasion of Sicily led to the swift collapse of Italian Fascism. On the July 25, the Italian Dictator, Mussolini, was deposed and arrested by his own Grand Council.

A new Royalist government under Marshal Badoglio then engaged in secret negotiations to switch Italy from the Axis to the UN camp. It was agreed that Italy's 8 September 1943 surrender announcement would coincide with major landings by the British 8th Army at Taranto (Operation Slapstick) and the British reinforced American 5th Army at Salerno (Operation Avalanche).

As a diversion, other units of the 8th Army crossed the Strait of Messina, which separated Sicily from the Italian mainland, at Reggio on the 3rd of September (Operation Baytown). Batswana combat and support troops participated in each of these landings.

The UN Forces Commander-in-Chief, General (later U.S.A. President) Dwight Eisenhower, along with his two senior deputies, the by now already larger than life British General Montgomery and US 5th Army Commander Lt-Gen Mark Clark, anticipated that Italy's surrender would lead to a rapid UN advance through southern Italy in order to secure the capital, Rome.

But this scenario was not to be. Instead Batswana gunners of the 278, 279 and 280 HAA Artillery Batteries were prominent among those who prevented a near disastrous American defeat at Salerno.

Operation Baytown went off without serious incident. The Italian Forces had already given up the fight, while the Germans pulled back. In the first 24 hours, the Batswana of 1977 Smoke and 1990 Pioneer Companies had joined the push up the toe of Italy to the strategic town of Crotone.

A total of five Batswana Companies – 1966, 1967, 1969, 1975 and 2302 – participated in Operation Slapstick, which also proceeded smoothly. Having recovered from its losses at Lentini, the 1967 Support Company was kept busy arming and fueling RAF planes.

The 1966 Company joined the advance on the Adriatic port of Brindisi, establishing along the way ammunition and fuel dumps for Montgomery's armoured divisions. The heavy 3.7 guns of the other two units provided air cover at the great port city of Taranto.

By October 1943, seven more Batswana companies had landed from Sicily and the Middle East. At the time, the greatest danger was on the sea rather than land.

In May 1943, the Bakgatla of 1974 company watched helplessly as the lives of 624 of their Basotho comrades were lost when the troopship SS Eripura was torpedoed in front of them by a German U-boat.

In the final months of 1943, the Germans unleashed a new super weapon on UN shipping and port facilities in the Mediterranean, the "Fritx X". The world's first operational guided missile, when mounted on specially designed Dornier light bombers the Fritz X was a formidable challenge to the Batswana gunners and smokescreen operators.

On 9 September 1943, the British and now allied Italian fleets suffered heavy losses when the Fritz X was deployed for the first time. This further complicated the task of Gen. McCreery's 10th Corps, incorporating 1976 (Bangwato) Company, which had landed at Salerno as the spearhead of Operation Avalanche, only to find themselves in front of the entire German 10th Army.

Defeat at Salerno was ultimately averted by a gun line of artillery that notably included Batswana of the 1976 Company, which had been reorganized as batteries 278, 279, 280 of the 87 HAA Regiment. After their success at Syracuse, the Batswana had been brought ashore with the expectation that their 3.7 Guns would provide air cover against high altitude bombers. But their role was quickly altered by the desperate situation on the beaches. The 3.7 barrels were instead depressed for field firing against German armour and artillery in the hills above Salerno. Their effectiveness soon provoked a vicious response from enemy .88 flak guns.

When German ground forces failed to silence the Batswana, they were attacked from the air. While the Lutfwaffe's Fritz X's played havoc on UN naval units, its fighters were able to top fly in low over Salerno Bay to attack the gun line from the rear.

With their barrels targeted at the hills, the Batswana were completely vulnerable to aerial strafing. Fortunately other, light anti-aircraft batteries were rushed to provide much needed support. On the morning of the 13th it appeared that the gun line would

"We hope to live up to the nations expectation. We will have limitations because of our country's restricted resources," **Major General Mompati Merafhe** – 22 April **1977**

"I know our army is competent even though one Member said our army is too small, enemies can just come for two days and do away with it. I would like to say that I do not think the army needs to be big in number to be competent. I think with the brains that we have steering the army we can sustain a war," **Mompati Merafhe** to the late **Gaborone North MP, Maitshwarelo Dabutha** in Parliament, 5th March **1991**

Ian Khama was the first Motswana to train at the Royal Military Academy in Sandhurst in 1972-73

be overrun, but by the evening of the 14th the Germans were forced to pull back.

As a result of the hard won victory at Salerno, the Batswana of 278, 279, and 280 HAA batteries provided artillery cover for the 5th Army's advance on the port city of Naples. They were thus involved in the heavy fighting at Chiunzi Pass, which resulted in a number of Batswana casualties from German mortar fire.

Having wreaked its harbour, the Germans, abandoned Naples at the end of the month to form a defensive "Volturno Line" running across Italy from Castle Volturno to the Adriatic port of Bari. The latter was captured by the 8th Army on October 4.

After securing Naples, the 5th Army advanced to the Volturno River where it challenged the German 10th for control of the strategic bridges at Capua, Grazzianise and Cancello. In this battle, the "Becs" of the 87th artillery helped secure the skies with their mobile 3.7 guns, while the "Desert Rats" of the 7th armoured carried out field firing for the advancing infantry.

On October 19, the Volturno Line was broken, but the Germans continued to inflict casualties on the American, British and allied forces, while falling back to their more heavily fortified "Gustav Line". In this advance, the Batswana gunners were once more ordered to revert to field firing on German units in the hills around the Gulf of Gaeta.

A Luftwaffe attack on the Bangwato and Bakwena gunners resulted in the downing of six German planes around the small coastal town of Mondragone. Former Pioneer Corp Major R.A.R. Bent later wrote:

"The fine work of the regiment from Salerno to the Garigliano approaches had earned its Colonel the D.S.O., and the honour of one was the honour of all. The spirit of the Bangwato gunners during these months of battle is hard to describe; it was sufficient to say that they were on top of the world, serving and firing great guns which were of no mean account in forcing the enemy from one position to another. No effort was too much for them, nor could anything terrify them: the African gunners dream of firing in the field had been fulfilled."

Meanwhile, at Bari, the Bangwato of 1979 Smoke Company also distinguished itself during a massive evening Luftwaffe raid. The enemy had hit an ammunition ship close to a 24-man Batswana platoon, which began to burn out of control.

Aware of the danger, the Batswana held their ground. When the explosion occurred five were killed and another seven critically wounded. One of the wounded was miraculously rescued floating unconscious out to sea with a head wound. He had been given up for dead when he returned to his unit 14 days later.

During the raid the dozen survivors struggled to maintain the screen surrounded by fire and death. A total of thirteen ships were sunk during the raid, all from hits sustained in the four minutes before the smoke screen was raised and maintained.

But for the 1979, in particular, a bad situation would have undoubtedly been much worse. For personal heroism in rallying his men following the explosion Corporal Chitu Bakombi was awarded the British Empire Medal.

In terms of manpower per capita no territory of the then British Empire, including Great Britain itself, played a greater role in the defeat of the Axis Powers than the Bechuanaland Protectorate.

There were incredible examples of productivity among the Batswana APC. As with any military formation the routine tasks of some of the troops were mundane but vital.

Many Batswana, for example, manned petrol depots during the British 8th Army's advance up the Italian peninsula. Other Batswana companies took pride in their ability to assemble prefabricated Bailey Bridges, designed with the capacity to withstand the weight of entire armoured columns, in a day. Apparently some of these "Bechuana bridges" were at least quite recently still in service, as are fortifications built by Batswana in Lebanon.

In 1943 the Bakwena of 1969 Company won special praise for their speedy construction of what was then the world's biggest ever prefabricated bridge over the Sangro River. During the winter of 1944, in the face of bitter cold and often intense German shelling, the same Company joined several other Batswana units in building and maintaining a road across the Apennines Mountains from Castel del Rio to Castel San Pietro. The resulting "La Strada di Bechuana" ("Batswana road") can still be found on Italian roadmaps.

Batswana were also kept busy laying and maintaining railway track. One war correspondent could not resist the line that it was now the Bechuana Pioneers (rather than the prewar Mussolini) who "kept the trains of Italy running on time".

The same article noted 1969 Company's incredible good luck as well as works. After a year at the front they had not suffered a single death. Indeed, on one occasion, while they were playing an inter-unit football match, a mine went off killing only their less fortunate Basotho opponents. 30

Hail our men

It is difficult to generalize about the experiences of Batswana who served in the African Pioneer Corps (1941-46). From the available documentary, as well as oral, evidence it is clear that the experiences of the troops varied greatly.

Some Batswana were thrust into combat roles. Others were not. Some forged close, even intimate, contacts with foreigners: Europeans, Arabs, other Africans and (especially black) Americans. To others such men and women remained an alien mystery.

About 40 percent of Batswana soldiers participated in the bloody two-year allied advance up the Italian peninsula. There they were often cold and wet; spending icy winters in tents or crude billets in the snow covered Apennines Mountains. Most of the other Batswana spent the war more quietly in the burning sands of Egypt and Libya.

Batswana troops were greeted by such notables as King George VI, Winston Churchill, Jan Smuts and top Generals like Montgomery and Mark Clark. On 26 March 1945, a handful of Batswana joined some Basotho and Swati in having what was considered the great honour of an audience with Pope Pius XII, a reflection of the Vatican's growing interest in the High Commission Territories.

For many, the experience of war strengthened their Christian convictions. This helped to spur a postwar expansion of independent church movements, as well as a more modest growth in the traditional mission based churches, which then enjoyed the exclusive sanction of Dikgosi.

Cross-cultural contact was, however, often limited by language. Only a few Batswana then spoke English, much less Arabic or Italian. From 1943 existing informal programmes to promote both literacy and English were given an official boost with the appointment of Education Sergeants.

Another tool for promoting literacy was a newsletter from back home edited by the Director of the Bechuanaland Education Department, Henry Dumbrell. This publication was inserted as a supplement into copies of the APC weekly newsletter Indlovu/Tlou.

The soldiers were also issued with copies of the self-described "leading South African native newspaper" Umtetli wa Bantu, which was sponsored by mining interests and otherwise contained home news forwarded by the colonial government. In 1944 these home news efforts were expanded and consolidated with the launch of a new, officially sponsored, Setswana newspaper –

Calling the men to parade

Naledi ya Batswana.

Across the globe the ravages of World War II were suffered by people irrespective of their age and gender, as well as other social attributes such as class, creed, colour and ethnicity. Woman and children, usually behind the lines, were slaughtered in great numbers.

With 60 percent of the able bodied men either in the APC or working in South Africa, the wartime burden of Batswana women was especially heavy. Notwithstanding the fact that Botswana had not known genuine food self-sufficiency since at least the 1890s, they were expected to sustain their families through domestic farming. When drought broke out in 1945-46 hunger stalked the land. In addition, many were forced to till communal plots – some 500 acres in Molepolole alone – as part of a "warlands" scheme. The granaries that still grace the central dikgotla of many villages are monuments to this effort.

Woman also worked in Gifts and Comforts sections, producing such things as socks, gloves, mufflers and morabaraba boards for the men. Levies were imposed to finance these efforts, though the woman's labour was "voluntary".

There were other impositions. A 5 pound levy was imposed on all households to pay for two Spitfires – the "Bechuanaland" and "Kalahari".

After the fall of Naples and the crossing of the Sangro and Volturno rivers, in October-November 1943, fighting between UN allied and German forces in southern Italy entered into a temporary stalemate. With winter setting in, the Germans were able to consolidate their "Gustav Line" defences, which ran across the peninsula south of Rome. By now several thousand Batswana were at the front.

On Wednesday 29, **1976**, members of the Police Mobile Unit exchanged gun-fire with Rhodesia forces at Matshelagabedi.

"Hon. Members will remember that the BDF is the only army which had no military infrastructure to inherit at its formation," **Sir Ketumile Masire** in his state of the nation address - 16 November **1992**

The winter itself was especially bad, with floods along the Adriatic adding to the misery of incessant sleet and snow. In the forward areas the Batswana, along with other frontline troops, were often forced to abandon their relatively comfortable billets (metal prefab shelters) for tents dug into the mud. These at least provided greater security from enemy shelling. All along the line, the Germans had the advantage of holding the high ground.

Perhaps the most interesting event to break the monotony of the dreary 1943-44 winter was the sudden eruption of Mount Vesuvius. The 1977 (Bangwato) and 1980 (Bakwena) Companies were camped at the foot of the volcano when the "rivers of fire" began to flow and had to be hastily evacuated.

Both Companies were then being transferred to the multinational US 5th Army to take part in the great battle for Cassino. With its surrounding hills, Cassino guarded the approaches to the Liri valley whose Highway 6 led to Rome. The need to take Cassino became all the more desperate when an American attempt to outflank the Germans by landing at Anzio, north of the Gustav Line, became bogged down.

Batswana called Cassino "Marumong", in this context meaning "place of bullets/shells". The name was appropriate given that over 200,000 men were killed in the fierce five month engagement.

The battle consisted of four UN offensives, three of which ended in frustration. Batswana, more especially 1977 Company, were prominent in the third offensive in March 1944 when they provided smoke cover for the advancing 2nd New Zealand Division. Initially all went well with Cassino town and railway station being secured by the New Zealanders, while its castle fortress was overrun by the 4th Indian Division.

But, the Germans atop the strategic Mount Cassino could not be dislodged. From its bombed out monastery they were able to take advantage of the high ground to pound the attackers with their artillery. It then became the task of 1977 to dodge machine gun fire in order to establish smoke screens in front of the enemy lines.

Notwithstanding their determination in the face of heavy enemy fire, the Batswana were not very successful. High winds prevented the maintenance of a proper smokescreen. As a result they apparently received some unfair blame.

In the end Gustav Line was only overrun in May 1944 after a massive, bloody assault by the Polish and American 2nd Corps, British 13th Corps and a Free French Corps made up mostly of Moroccans and Algerians.

After the fall of Cassino the UN forces in Italy pushed the Germans out of central Italy, taking Rome on 4 June 1944. The enemy then fell back to its "Gothic Line", a series of defenses 16 kilometers deep stretching over 200 kilometers across some of the highest mountains of the Apennines.

To the north was the Po valley, where industrial heartland of northern Italy was located. Beyond were the Alpine passes that led into Germany proper.

A million German troops manned the Gothic line, which came under sustained assault from August through October 1944. Keeping such large numbers of the enemy pinned down was a major allied objective.

For there part the ranks of the allied 5th and 8th Armies had been both qualitatively and quantitatively reduced to meet the demands of "Operation Overlord", the great cross channel invasion of France. The services of the Batswana, along with Basotho, British Indian, and Mauritian, Pioneers were thus in especially high

Batswana soldiers unload supplies

demand all along the frontline.

In August the renaissance city of Firenze (Florence) fell in bitter fighting to the 5th Army's South African division. Within days the Pioneers of 1969 (Bakwena) Company had erected Bailey bridges across the Arno river.

In February 1945 the battle hardened 1972 (Bangwato) Company, later joined by 1974 (Bakgatla, Balete, Batlokwa), Company pounded German coastal positions near Pisa. Further inland 1976 (Bangwato) Company helped provide cover for the New Zealanders, Poles, Americans, Indians, and allied Italians of the 5th Army's right flank.

The American generals continued to show greater enthusiasm for the battlefield prowess of the Batswana-manned 3.7 guns. The Bakwena, Bangwaketse and Bangwato gunners in the British 8th army were generally kept behind the lines until April 1945, when they played an active role at Senio. It was in the same month that both armies launched their final offensive with a rapid advance that resulted in a final German surrender in Italy on April 29.

Two weeks later, Victory in Europe found Batswana advancing into Austria and linking up with Marshal Tito's Yugoslav partisans at Gorizia and Trieste. Elsewhere, many Batswana and Basotho pioneers helped restore the port of Venice, allowing food and supplies to reach the vanquished enemy as well as victorious allies.

By August all of the Batswana had been withdrawn from Italy back to rejoin their brothers still stationed in the Middle East. Due to shipping shortages most did not finally make it back to Botswana until 1946.

In August 1945, the Officer Commanding the 1974 (Bakgatla, Balete, Batlokwa) H.A.A. Company, G.J.L. Atkinson, informed the Protectorate's Government Secretary, Gerald Nettleton, that there had been no instances of mass disobedience among the Batswana gunners.

Back in Botswana, a few former APC soldiers, such as ex-Sergeants Philip Matante and Amos Dambe, ultimately played leading roles in the subsequent emergence of the nationalist political parties.

Batswana troops came back with new skills that, due to the lack of opportunity at home and racist job reservation across the borders, proved to be of little subsequent benefit to them. The same is true of those blacks who rose to more skilled occupations in Gauteng's war industries only to be pushed back down the ladder with peace.

Then there is the most overlooked of all local veterans, the women who maintained the nation, nurturing its post-independence leadership. In Molepolole, when their men folk returned in 1946, they sang a song which roughly translates: "Hail Kgosi Kgari, Our men have come home through the grace of God, Bakwena, Bangwaketse, Bangwato, we are one nation!" 30

A journey to the present

"No responsible government can sit back while its citizens are being killed and maimed by trigger happy and blood-thirsty agents of an illegal regime,' **President Seretse Khama** (March **1977**) discussing reasons for BDF's formation

"The government of Botswana is not asking for talks with Rhodesia government. We want them to stop acts of aggression and terrorism in Botswana,"– **Minister of Foreign Affairs, Archibald Mogwe** in December **1976**

As I take Command of this Defence Force, I am under no illusion about the difficulties that lie ahead. However, I am confident that with the support of the Government and people of Botswana, especially Officers, Men and civilian staff of the BDF, I will make a notable contribution to the development of the BDF – **Lt Gen T. H. C. Masire, Commander, BDF** on taking over command of BDF on 01 October, 2006.

At independence on 30 September 1966, the new state of Botswana faced a number of socio-economic and political challenges that threatened its very survival. It was among the poorest in the world, and there were high levels of illiteracy and poverty.

Weak and poor as the new republic was, it was completely surrounded by hostile, racist regimes: apartheid South Africa in the south, South African-occupied South West Africa in the west, and Rhodesia to the north. In these countries, the wars of liberation were heating up. The phrase coined by the foreign affairs officials to describe Botswana as an island of harmony in a sea of insanity seemed quite apt. True to expectations, the territorial sovereignty of Botswana was violated at will.

Paramilitary duties were assigned to a small unit within the police service known as the Police Mobile Unit. In stark contrast to most countries in the region, Botswana did not inherit a standing army at independence.

Despite the clear security threat to the country posed by its neighbours who maintained world-class war machineries, Seretse Khama's government took a decision not to establish an army. It was a decision that had its fiercest critics as well as adherent believers. One such critic was Botswana Peoples Party leader Phillip Matante. He would call for the establishment of a national army in Parliament.

There are many explanations to the government's position at the time. One has to do with the country's economic standing. It depended on Britain, the former colonial power, for its entire budget, and there were many competing basic needs such as education, healthcare, roads, and telecommunications. An army was not seen as a priority given that it is an expensive undertaking – both to establish and maintain. The

A victim of the Lesoma Ambush being taken for medical examination

Former president Sir Ketumile Masire (middle) and Lt. General Mompati Merafhe (second from left) visit BDF soldiers in the field

President Seretse Khama commissions the first class of Officer Cadets

other explanation – often preferred by the critics of the policy – is that armies in Africa were often an embarrassment and irritant due to the coups that were fashionable in Africa. The other is that the country's weakness and vulnerability would be its security. It would easily win the sympathy of the international community against the well-armed surrounding countries. Seretse is said to have once told an interviewer that, "Botswana derives its strength from its weakness".

Despite the country's vulnerability, its stature in international affairs grew phenomenally. It publicly condemned the racist policies of its neighbours – something that attracted the ire of the regimes in question. Being a signatory to international treaties, it opened its doors to refugees fleeing the oppressive policies of its neighbours, and refused to hand them back when asked to do so by their governments. This led to more territorial transgressions.

The mid-1970s saw an upsurge in the wars of liberation in the region. Mozambique and Angola had gained independence in 1975. The world opinion was turning against racist regimes. The liberation movements in Rhodesia, South West Africa and South Africa were emboldened and believed that they could win decisive military battles. Tanzania and Zambia to the north provided military bases for the liberation armies. This proved a headache for Botswana. While an ardent opponent of racist policies, and a supporter of the liberation movements, the country did not allow its territory to be used as a launch pad for attacks against its neighbours – no matter how deeply it felt about the moral issues at hand. It was a stand some saw as somewhat contradictory.

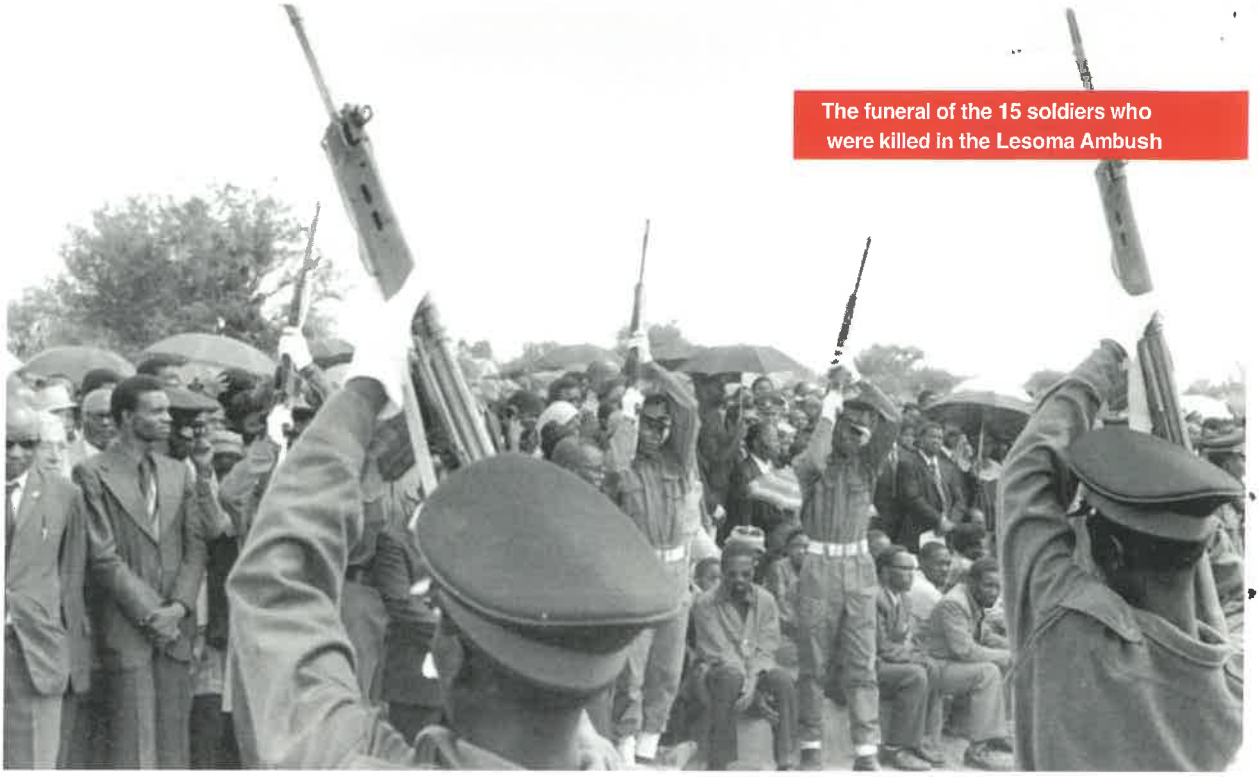
The changing geo-politics of the region would lead Botswana to change its security policy. Following well-documented territorial transgressions against Botswana, as well the country's appeal to the United Nations, the international body dispatched a commission to investigate the security needs of the country. The commission recommended that the country be assisted to form a national army.

In April 1977, five months short of Botswana's 11th anniversary of independence, Parliament passed the Botswana Defence Force Bill.

Without any modern military infrastructure in place, everything had to be started from Ground Zero. The 132 men from PMU would form the nucleus of the new army. It was to be a completely volunteer army, to be joined without conscription.

Police deputy commissioner and head of PMU, Mompati Merafhe, was made head of the army at the rank of Major General. His deputy was another PMU man, Seretse Khama Ian Khama, the 24-year-old son of the president, who assumed the rank of Brigadier – making him probably the youngest army officer in modern times to hold that rank. It was a controversial appointment. Some said it was the president's way of buying insurance against the possibility of a coup. Going for the young Khama was that he happened to be the only Motswana with military training having graduated from Britain's Royal Military Academy in Sandhurst.

Soon, Merafhe went about building the army in earnest. It ranged from the smallest detail like design of the army's insignia to recruiting personnel, and securing weapons. He



The funeral of the 15 soldiers who were killed in the Lesoma Ambush

In December **1976**, the Rhodesia regime declared the entire eastern border of Botswana as operational or war zone

personally interviewed the first crop of officer cadets, who would graduate to be the army's future leaders in its later years – men like Tebogo Masire, Albert Scheffers, and Dikgakgamatso Seretse.

The international community threw open its training facilities to members of the new army. The officers and men were trained in friendly countries such as Zambia, China, USSR, Britain and United States. It was Botswana's unique stance that attracted military assistance from both sides of the iron curtain. Technical assistance also came by way of arms.

"The members of the force must be true nationals of this country and we should guard against trigger-happy and trigger free army."
Englishman Kgabo [Kweneng East MP] discussing the BDF bill in Parliament, **1977**

Learning from the pitfalls of many African countries' experiences with their armies, Merafhe set out to build an army that would be, "disciplined, mobile, and efficient". He took a view that while he would compromise on many issues, he would never compromise on discipline. His view was that "an undisciplined army is a mob". One incident that demonstrated his impatience with indiscipline was when a group of 16 soldiers in Francistown almost engaged in mutiny. He ordered an aircraft to fly him to Francistown. On arrival, he summoned the men, and expelled them from the army.

The young army faced many challenges – but nothing would prepare it for 27 February 1978.

Lesoma – a small village outside the tourist haven of Kasane – was populated by peasant farmers. Being on the border with Zimbabwe, it was one of the scenes of territorial transgressions by the Rhodesian forces. The villagers were used to machinations of the Rhodesians. However, on the morning of Monday 27 February 1978, the air hung with tension. A low-flying Rhodesian helicopter and a spotter plane hovered over Lesoma.

In the afternoon, village headman Jameson Kelesitswe was informed that some Rhodesian soldiers had crossed into Botswana. He dispatched two teenagers to report this to members of the BDF at the Kazungula camp. They left on bicycles. One was the headman's own son, Gure.

At Kazungula, Gure Kelesitswe and his companion Owe Simon explained the situation to platoon commander, Lt. Benson Sennanyana. A platoon of 33 BDF soldiers left for Lesoma accompanied by the two emissaries.

Sennanyana went to meet headman Kelesitswe and additional information came out that some guerillas were also suspected to be hiding in the vicinity. Lt. Sennanyana ordered his men to comb the area where the guerillas were suspected to be hiding. The search led to a small base used by the guerillas. Two gave themselves in without any resistance, while one escaped.

Satisfied that there was nothing more to worry about, Lt. Sennanyana ordered his men to drive back to Kazungula. On the way, the convoy of three Land Rovers ran into an ambush. The Rhodesians had positioned themselves at a vantage point on the hilly part of the area. The strike was quick, unexpected, and paralyzing.

When the guns fell silent, 15 BDF men lay dead. So did Owe Simon and one of the guerillas. Survivors crawled to hide in the bushes. Others, badly injured, wandered aimlessly through the bush.

The village of Lesoma was engulfed in a dark smoke of death and fear. Residents fled their homes to hide in the bush.

In Gaborone, news of the attack reached the commander. He drove to break the news to the Commander-in-Chief, President Sir Seretse Khama who, though shattered, put up a brave face.

On 19 May **1986** South African Defence Force (SADF) raided again, this time in Mogoditshane, killing one person and wounding 3, including a BDF member

Sir Seretse would later remark that the ambush was an act of desperation by the Rhodesian regime.

"Desperate men have no sense of values; no sense of morality; and no regard for the sanctity of human life," he said.

Merafhe would later recall in one interview: "It never occurred to us that the Rhodesians could be so desperate as to come into our territory and set up an ambush to kill us. It was painful, but I had to take it like a soldier. The incident strengthened my resolve to deal with the incursions. There was no going back. You can't surrender in the face of a challenge. The people of Botswana looked up to us to defend this country."

In the afternoon of February 28, Vice President Masire made a special statement in Parliament, in which he spelt out government's response to the attack: "I am at a complete loss to understand the reasons for this brutal and unprovoked attack. This can only be an act of an insane regime".

Masire announced closure of the border post at Kazungula on Botswana's border with Rhodesia.

Merafhe flew to Kasane with his deputy in a small Defender aircraft. At the scene of the ambush lay charred bodies of men he knew personally.

In an interview with Kutlwano magazine, Sennanyana described the ambush: "The trap was well-laid. Those people knew what they were up to. They knew where and how to get us, and they did. It was sinister. Horrible. The attack was strategic, swift, and paralysisng. We did not have a ghost of a chance to shoot back, or think clearly. All we knew was that we were under heavy attack, and everybody tried hard to survive. Bullets and hand grenades were ripping our vehicles apart. The vehicles caught fire, and our spare ammunition exploded."

Later there was a feeble explanation from Rhodesia that they had mistaken BDF soldiers for guerillas fighting their regime.

Merafhe would retort: "These were BDF soldiers in uniform. How do freedom fighters get to drive BDF Land Rovers? The question of identity was not in dispute. They knew who they were killing".

At the UN Security Council, New York, Ambassador Thomas Tlou presented Botswana's case. He addressed the Council on March 9, reiterating Botswana's abhorrence to minority and racist rule in the region.

"If these attacks are aimed at forcing Botswana to abandon its scared duty to support the legitimate struggle of the people of Zimbabwe, then (Ian) Smith is deluding himself. Botswana will continue to rally behind the people of Zimbabwe in their hour of greatest need," he said.

The outpour of international condemnation was phenomenal. More countries pledged technical and material military aid. Rhodesia found itself even more isolated. There was a toughning of attitudes by many governments against Rhodesia.

Locally, more young men stepped forward to volunteer for military service.

On the day of the funeral, there was a public outpour grief and a sense of loss hitherto unseen in Botswana. Sir Seretse, First lady Ruth Khama, and members of Cabinet led the nation in mourning. People fainted. Many were ferried to Princess Marina Hospital. Others were attended to at the makeshift first aid points that had been set up at the cemetery by the Botswana Red Cross Society.

The 15 were interred at the Gaborone Cemetery in full military honour.

Paying tribute to his fallen men, Lt. Gen Mompati Merafhe told the mourners that, "There is no greater honour than dying in defence of one's country".

On 13 August, 1997 a monument bearing the names of the 15 soldiers was unveiled in Lesoma by Masire, who had since become President and BDF's Commander-in-Chief.

President Seretse Khama inspects a guard of honour mounted by the BDF

The pioneers

"...you cannot tell someone with whom you are not fighting to sign an non-aggression pact," **Sir Ketumile Masire** advancing Botswana's reason for refusing to sign the Nkomati-Accord with South African government in **1984**

"You are the pioneers of the Defence Force and your task is to set acceptable standards which future generations can follow," **Major General Mompati Merafhe** at the passing out parade of first BDF intake. – April **1977**

In the morning of 14 June **1985**, the South African Defence Force (SADF) raided Gaborone, killing 12 people and injuring one

Second Lieutenants (from Left) Albert Scheffers, Ezekiel Rakgole, Jagamang Seduke, and Tebogo Masire were among the first class of BDF's Officer Cadets

There is a distinct class of officers (retired and serving) who carry a particular honour. They are Botswana Defence Force's first class of Officer Cadets.

Among the 25 who stepped forward in 1977 when the nation called on its young men to defend it, was Brigadier Nelson Modiko. Aged 21, he had just completed secondary education and was awaiting government scholarship to further his studies. He had toyed around with the idea of joining the Department of Wildlife and National Parks. However, his career plans would change when the newly established BDF flighted an advertisement for Officer Cadets.

He had never considered a military career before because Botswana had no standing army prior to 1977, but he was attracted by the prospect of being part of the foundation of an important national institution. The other attraction was that the Officer Cadets were going to be sent outside the country for military training.

After basic training in Botswana, 11 of them – including Brigadier Modiko – were sent to Zambia for infantry training, which lasted a year. They knew early on that they were being prepared for huge challenges that lay ahead. They were the future leaders of the BDF, and immediately on arrival, they were given men to lead.

Thirty years later, Brigadier Modiko marvels at the massive development and changes the BDF has experienced.

"The BDF has grown in size, equipment, and infrastructure. I don't think 30 years back anybody would have thought the BDF would grow to this size. Of course, more still needs to be done. The country is vast, and there are many areas where we should be, but we aren't due to manpower constraints," he says.

In his long military career, Brigadier Modiko has served as Defence Attaché in Britain (1988 – 1991) and South Africa (1995 – 1999). He was in the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission to Mozambique in 1993 – 1994.

Colonel Badirile Mooketsi used to watch members of the Police Mobile Unit training, and he made a secret vow that once through with schooling, that would be his career destination. He had nearly joined the police service after Junior Certificate, but his parents stepped in and asked him to do the two final years of secondary schooling. As fate would have it, a few months after he

completed O'Levels, Botswana established its army, with the PMU as the nucleus.

He was among the 11 that went for infantry training in Zambia. At that time, BDF had two companies in Francistown, and others in Gaborone. It has since grown to battalions, and brigades.

Colonel Mooketsi shares the view that the growth has not only been in numbers, but in professionalism and equipment as well.

"Sometimes I wonder how we survived in the past. We did border patrols, yet we had no equipment. The biggest rifle we had was the GPMG (General purpose Machine Gun). There were no armoured cars," he says.

Despite the obvious constraints, the soldiers never compromised on morale and determination. They stood their ground against the intimidation and provocation of the hostile armies during the regional wars of liberation. Colonel Mooketsi recalls how the Rhodesians used to fly into Botswana to distribute propaganda leaflets aimed at the Zimbabwean refugee community in Botswana. At times, there would be exchanges of fire along the border.

"We couldn't bring down their aircraft because we were restricted by the weapons we had," he says.

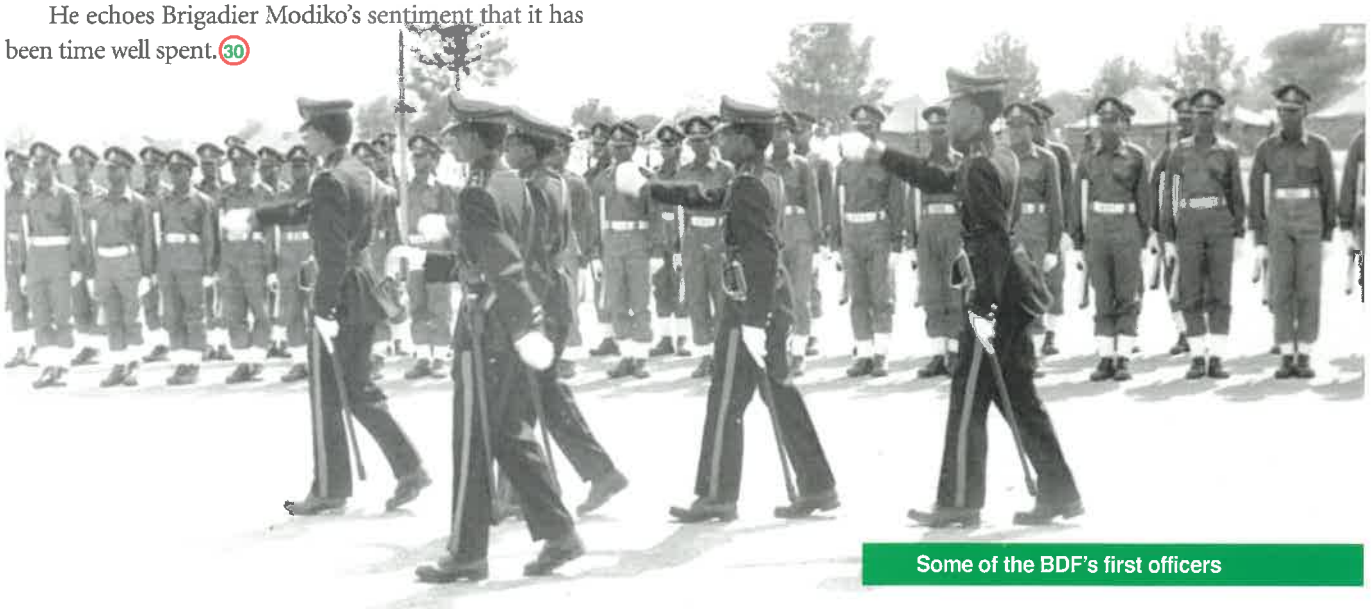
In 1986, he was granted a study leave to read for a law degree at University of Botswana, which he completed in 1991. He has also graduated from the United States War College with a Master's in Strategic Studies, and has studied Defence Management at Wits University. He has attended a number of other military and civilian courses in India, Britain, and Italy.

After 30 years in uniform, Colonel Mooketsi will retire from the army at the end of June. He will be a satisfied man knowing that he served the nation to the best of his ability, but also grateful that the nation has invested in him.

"I will miss the army, but I will always be in contact," he says.

He echoes Brigadier Modiko's sentiment that it has been time well spent. 30

Colonel Mooketsi



Some of the BDF's first officers

The making of a soldier

2004: BDF has deployed personnel in the African Union Liaison Mission in Ethopia/Eritrea to monitor the peace deal between the two countries
July **2004:** BDF sends military observers in Darfur, Sudan to monitor complience to peace deal between the two rebels groups and government troops

1998: BDF participates in 'Operation BOLEAS,' a SADC military intervention in Lesotho

"Acting President, I am sure the Attorney General and Minister Motsumi are awaiting with anticipation my pronouncement on the topical issue of Women in the BDF. I am happy to inform you that we shall be presenting our final report to the Defence Council at the next meeting and with their blessing, recruitment for the first cadre of women into the BDF will commence by March next year, ending our 30 years as a prestigious Men's Club" – **Lt Gen T. H. C. Masire** announcing the intended recruitment of women in the BDF

Botswana Defence Force draws its members from the broader Botswana community. The first requirement to enlist in BDF is to be a citizen of Botswana, followed by the necessary academic achievement. The academic requirements differ according to the entry level. The requirements for Officer Cadets are higher than those for Recruits.

The prospective soldiers undergo a military medical examination. This is a more stringent test than the usual medical examination. The examination is meant to determine if the candidate is fit enough to withstand the rigours of military training.

Primarily, BDF trains its personnel to follow either of the two streams: leadership and men. Officer Cadets are developed to be leaders, while Recruits (Private) are trained to be basic soldiers. Both Officer Cadets and Recruits undergo a six-month basic soldier training because even though the other stream is trained for leadership, they are soldiers first and officers later. The Officer Cadets undertake an additional six-month training, which is meant to equip them with leadership skills.

The essence of military training is underscored by two things that the army wants to impart to its new members. The first is military character. This is meant to make one think like a soldier. It emphasises discipline and obedience to orders without question. Military character also entails inculcating military values such as reliability, sense of duty, trustworthiness, and espirit de corps.

The military character also implies living by the principle of one for all, and all for one. One of the sacrifices a soldier makes is loss of certain civil rights enjoyed by civilians. For instance, soldiers cannot be involved in party politics, and are subordinate to the government of the day. They become subject to the Botswana Defence Force Act, which confines them to a defined set of rules. It is also during training that the new soldiers would be instructed in military law.

Besides military character, the new soldier is equipped with military skills. These include shooting, map reading, physical endurance, and military tactics.

"We ensure that one doesn't think that a soldier is someone who has a gun and can shoot. A composite of all is what makes a soldier," explains Colonel Gotsileene Morake, Deputy Assistant Chief of Staff – Training.

During training, the day starts as early as 4. 00am with cleaning of surroundings and bathing because the army emphasises hygiene. This is followed by physical training, before breaking for breakfast. Then it is back to parade to start the day's programme, which is divided between practice and theory.

Every new soldier encounters culture shock. In the early days, the thought of quitting runs through every soldier's mind.

"During that period, there is close supervision because it is period of confusion; when we break one from being a civilian, and remake them as a soldier. That period passes, and comes acceptance that one is a soldier undergoing training. You move to a stage where you enjoy physical exertion, and develop a soldier's character. Your mind gets robust," explains Colonel Morake.

A field course on tactics

At the end of training, one is just a basic soldier who is not yet ready for military operations. They are assigned a unit, which is an area of specialization, where they will get special to arm training. For instance, pilots are put through flying school; gunners are put through artillery school, while assault engineers are sent to pioneer school.

This is meant to establish a common base to prepare one for further training in preparation for they role they are going to fulfill. At completion of special to arm training, one is now considered ready for military operations.

Designation to a unit is at the discretion of the Commander. During training, trainees would usually demonstrate areas where they excel and their instructors recommend to the command the suitability of an individual for a specific unit.

Though the individual is also allowed a say in where he goes, the BDF decides where it wants to employ him. This is in line with the attestation one signs when they enlist that they agree to be transferable at the discretion of the Commander, and that they are totally deployable in and outside the country. If the Commander-in-Chief so wishes, any soldier is a candidate for obligatory military service outside Botswana.

For a soldier, training never really ends. Officers, for instance, go for instructors courses, advanced tactical courses, and command courses. Few select officers are sent for very specialist courses at strategic level at war colleges. Some are even sent for non-military courses to acquire management and administrative skills. There is a deliberate effort to equip soldiers with technical skills parallel to the military training that goes on continuously to a soldier thus making a balanced portfolio. This is underscored by the military tradition that in peacetime, the role of an army is to train and sharpen its skills.

Scaling the hurdles

Towards food security

"I must also point out that the role of the defence force is not only that of fighting a war. Armed poachers from neighbouring countries are a menace to our wildlife resources and the defence force has been helping the Wildlife Department in anti-poaching activities," – **Sir Ketumile Masire** in his state of the nation address- 16 November **1992**

"...As a sovereign state we have an obligation to protect our citizen and their property against external and internal forms of aggression. We are aware that resources do not permit us to develop the defence force to its full operational capability. However, it would also be negligence on our part if we do not allocate funds, however meagre they may be, to the development of our defence capability," **Sir Ketumile Masire** in his state of the nation address -16 November **1992**

November **2006**: **Lieutenant General Tebogo Masire** takes over the command of the BDF from **Lieutenant General Matshwenyego Fisher**

Out of the initiative to encourage soldiers to engage in backyard gardening, today Botswana Defence Force has thriving horticultural projects.

At BDF's inception, the founding commander Lieutenant General Mompati Merafhe encouraged soldiers to take up gardening to improve food availability in their homes. Every homestead within each camp was expected to have a garden.

It later involved Units, which were allocated pieces of land within BDF camps to establish their gardens.

To encourage and motivate the Units and individuals, BDF introduced gardening competitions.

The success of the gardening project led to establishment of a Section within BDF Headquarters to coordinate the project. Large agricultural projects were then established, including acquisition of farms in Pitsane and Francistown.

Though all the BDF Units, as well as a lot of individual soldiers are into gardening, over the years there has been a downward trend among the camps in the southern part of the country due to lack of water. In some camps, backyard gardening has stopped completely as a result of water restrictions. However, in other parts of the country where there is no pressure on water resources, backyard gardening still thrives. Units still produce vegetables and sell to their members.

The interest in agriculture led the BDF to train some of its personnel in agricultural science, up to Master's level. The training is spread throughout the ranks.

The produce is varied. The vegetables are spinach, carrots, beetroots, cabbage, tomatoes and onions, while fruits include oranges and naartjes. Also grown are cereal crops such as sorghum, maize and beans. The project has since been diversified to embrace dairy, small stock, poultry, ostriches, dry land farming, and citrus production.

The produce is supplied to BDF kitchens, and sold to individual soldiers as well as members of the public.

As a way to address the problem of water shortage, there are efforts to identify sustainable water sources. In Pitsane, the use of boreholes is highly relied upon. In the north, both underground and surface water is used. Use of effluent water is being explored for use in Gaborone.

There are concerted efforts to transfer agricultural skills to individual soldiers. Some are attached to the farms, while others are sent for formal training to vocational training centres. On a regular basis, seminars are conducted to induct new entrants to horticulture. A few retired soldiers, who acquired agricultural skills while in service, are now engaged in agriculture as a serious business. 30

Harvesting at one of BDF's gardens

Responding to internal threats

Botswana Defence Force's participation in Aid to Civil Authority activities is a reflection that the army's mission goes beyond its core business of defending the country's territory against external aggression.

The BDF has rendered assistance to the Police Service, Department of Wildlife and National Parks, the Ministry of Agriculture, as well as providing relief services during natural disasters. The BDF has participated in all the natural calamities that have hit Botswana, such as Cattle Lung Disease in 1995, and the numerous outbreaks of Foot and Mouth Disease in various parts of the country. BDF members and equipment also played a critical role during the periodic floods that have hit various parts of the country at different times such as Palapye, and Sowa.

Major General Pius Mokgware

Commander of the Ground Forces, Major General Pius Mokgware, explains that in all operations in which the army assists the police, soldiers have to be accompanied by law enforcement officers. Assistance to the police includes routine patrol of the streets, following up of criminals and criminal activities, as well as collection of information.

BDF members are able to render this kind of assistance because the army trains its personnel for a wide spectrum of duties. This includes fighting in a war situation, peacekeeping, low intensity conflict, and Aid to Civil Authority activities. The soldiers are trained for all activities that the leadership anticipates them to be involved in.

The BDF is also highly involved in anti-poaching activities. Its members are active throughout the country in areas that have wildlife. As well as deploying men on the field, BDF officers have also trained staff from the Department of Wildlife and National Parks.

General Mokgware's assessment of the poaching situation is that it has gone down in some areas, and gone up in others. Most of the poaching is for subsistence, while poaching of big game, such as elephants, has been reduced considerably. Last year 13 elephants were lost to poachers in a week. All of them were in the area around the tourist hub of Kasane. General Mokgware says the loss was "too much", and efforts have been stepped to prevent further losses.

Anti-poaching activities obviously puts BDF men in the line of danger because commercial poachers are known to fight back. They are usually armed with arms of war. Last year, BDF soldiers arrested some poachers who were armed with AK 47 rifles. They were also found in possession of military attire.

"These people don't just run away. They fire back, and put up a fight. Even their tactics are basic military tactics. So we are up against people who know what they want and how to get it," says General Mokgware.

He explains that BDF's commitment to stamp out poaching comes from realisation of the importance of wildlife to Botswana's economy, especially given that tourism is emerging as an important alternative engine of economic growth.

"We take our anti-poaching assignment very seriously because tourism is one of the pillars of our country's economy, and we have a responsibility as the army to protect such national assets as the country's wildlife," he states.

In anticipation of natural disasters, the BDF has placed

The military have also played a significant role in disaster relief operations, and provided aid to the civil authorities – **Sir Ketumile Masire** in his state of the nation address- 16 November **1992**

On Tuesday 14, **1974** – Rhodesia forces attacked the village of Moroka in the North East, burning two houses

BDF soldiers inspect the carcass of an elephant killed by poachers

its assets in various areas around the country that are known to be prone to disasters, especially floods. These include the area around Mahalapye, Selebi-Phikwe, Maun, Kasane, Pandamatenga, and Sowa. The soldiers who respond to such emergencies are highly trained to be able to render the needed service safely, without endangering their own lives in the process.

"We train our soldiers such that when they rescue victims, they don't become victims themselves," General Mokgware explains. (30)

Private Kagiso Tobane who was awarded a medal for bravery, after he restrained a lion that had attacked him in **1988**

BDF soldiers on street patrol with the police

Taming the bombs

Captain Matebesi Chengedzani Matebesi enlisted in the infant Botswana Defence Force as a Private in October 1977. It happened that one day after completing secondary education and wondering what to do with his life, he came across an advert calling on young men aged 18 – 24 to enlist in the BDF.

Spurned on by realisation of the security challenges that Botswana faced at the time, he decided that instead of being a spectator he should be involved. It was a decision made purely out of patriotic consideration. He thought he would make a difference, in whatever small way he could.

He was in an intake of about 550. Because of the security threat of the time, the recruits underwent basic military training of only three months, before being deployed to operational areas. Last minute changes ensured that he was not in the platoon that was deployed to the area around Kasane. If it were not for those changes, perhaps he could have been among those who were involved in the Lesoma Ambush. Among those who perished in the Ambush were men he had trained with.

Predictably, the loss of the 15 soldiers greatly bereaved men like Matebesi.

"Having trained together, we had become a family, and it was difficult dealing with the brutal death of such close comrades. It hit us hard also because it was the first time that as an army we experienced such a loss. The loss made us even more determined to stand up in defence of our country," Matebesi says.

Early in his military career, Matebesi had a fascination with rifles. Once, he rebuilt a discarded AK 47 and restored it. That was before BDF had rifle technicians.

When the Composite Supply Unit was formed in 1982, he requested to be transferred from Selebi-Phikwe, where he had been stationed since 1977, because he wanted to be part of the new Unit. He was attracted to the new Unit because it specialized in general stores and arms. It was as a member of that Unit that he was sent for a two-year ammunitions course in Britain. The course introduced him to ammunitions and explosives.

When he got back to Gaborone, he benefited from a course on small arms that was run by the Indian Army Training Team.

The various training programmes he received prepared him for Explosive Ordinance Disposal. He was at hand to neutralize many explosives that were targeted at political refugees during the liberation wars in the region.

"There is a way to cushion an explosive so that it doesn't injure personnel and property. But any slight mistake might lead to death or a serious injury. Safety is of paramount importance in this job. Fortunately, explosives and bombs have many safety features that make the job easier," he says.

Matebesi's insightful knowledge of arms has made him an important ally of the Botswana Police Service and the Directorate of Public Prosecutions. Whenever police officers recover weapons used to commit a crime, they bring them to Matebesi to analyse. He then prepares a report for the prosecuting authority. He would then appear as a prosecution witness.

"I have squared up with some of the best defence lawyers in this country. Because I know my field they never intimidate me. I have given evidence in courts throughout the country. I have been to Maun, Tsabong, Ghanzi, and Francistown. I have given evidence in most murder cases involving guns," he states.

Matebesi's expertise has taken him to United Nations peacekeeping missions in Somalia and Mozambique. In Somalia, he was head of Explosives Ordinance Disposal team.

It was in service of the UN in Somalia that he once broke one of the cardinal rules of explosives disposal. Word reached the BDF contingent that an explosive was planted between the UN office and a house in which there was a critically ill elderly man. He knew that no explosive device, especially of unknown nature, should be handled by hands. Some are anti-lift, while others are anti-movement. But in this case, he took the bomb with his hands, and blew it up some 25 metres from where it was planted.

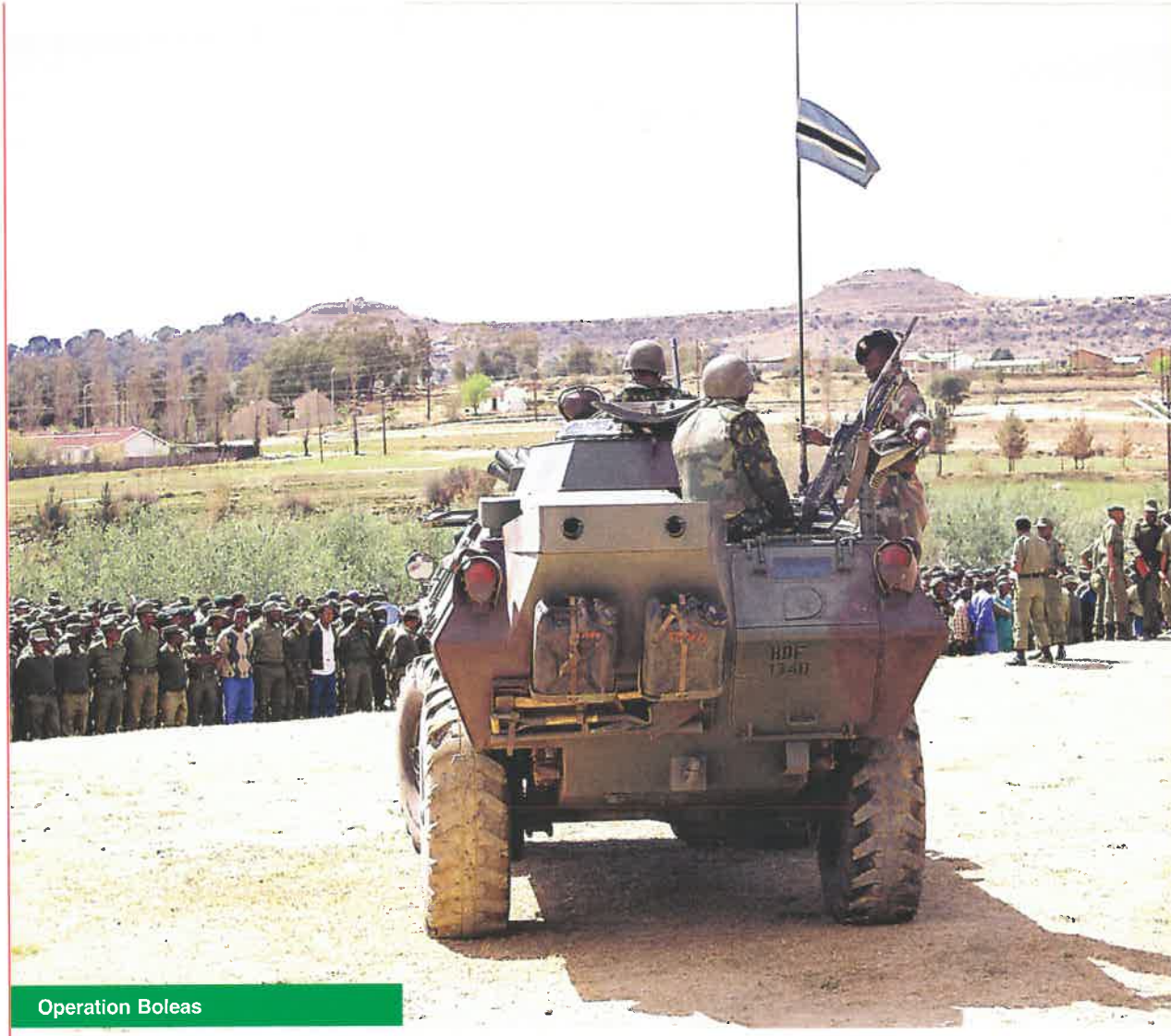
"It was a very dangerous thing to do, but had the bomb went off where it had been planted, it was either going to cause a lot of damage to the UN office or the house sheltering a patient, or both. On the day, duty expected me to put my life between danger and the property and people I was assigned to protect," he explains his act of bravery.

Captain Matebesi Matebesi

1992 and **1993**: BDF undertakes "Operation Restore Hope,' a US led coalition of forces to restore peace in Somalia.
1994: BDF participates in UN peace-keeping force in Rwanda as observers

2004: BDF has deployed personnel in the African Union Liason Mission in Ethopia/Eriteria to monitor the peace deal between the two countries
July **2004**: BDF sends military observers in Darfur, Sudan to monitor complience to peace deal between the two rebels groups and government troops

1998: BDF participates in 'Operation BOLEAS,' a SADC military intervention in Lesotho



Operation Boleas

Messengers of peace

In December 1992, BDF sent its first contingent to serve outside Botswana borders as part of the United Nations sanctioned peace keeping mission in Somalia.

The BDF contingent on the mission code-named "Operation Restore Hope" was led by Lieutenant Colonel Thulaganyo Masisi, now a Brigadier.

From then onwards, the BDF has participated – in varied degrees – in several UN peace-keeping missions in the continent, to great acclaim.

Before leading BDF troops in Somalia, Masisi had completed a Command and General Staff Course in the United States of America. He had also attended strategic leadership courses around the world and beefed up his knowledge by reading extensively about UN peace-keeping missions.

When an opportunity came to put his theory into practice, Masisi was not overawed by the assignment at hand.

BDF sent 300 troops who served with great distinction and earned the country international acclaim. A man who is always prepared for all seasons, Masisi and his men were taken aback by the gun culture that ruled the streets of Somalia. Even children who should have been learning to write their names in classrooms, paraded guns in the alleys.

"Those kids were trained soldiers. Their handling of rifles was impressive," Masisi observed upon his return from Somalia.

That taught Masisi and his men, "to treat everyone as a soldier".

Brigadier Thulaganyo Masisi

Somalia was hard to tame. But it ensured that Masisi and his troops were firm, but fair. At all times, BDF soldiers informed Somalis that they were not an occupying force, but were in the country to ensure that peace was secured. That approach won the BDF the generous support of the Somali people.

BDF sustained minimum casualties due to diligence. As Masisi puts it, "a soldier who is alert is not an easy target".

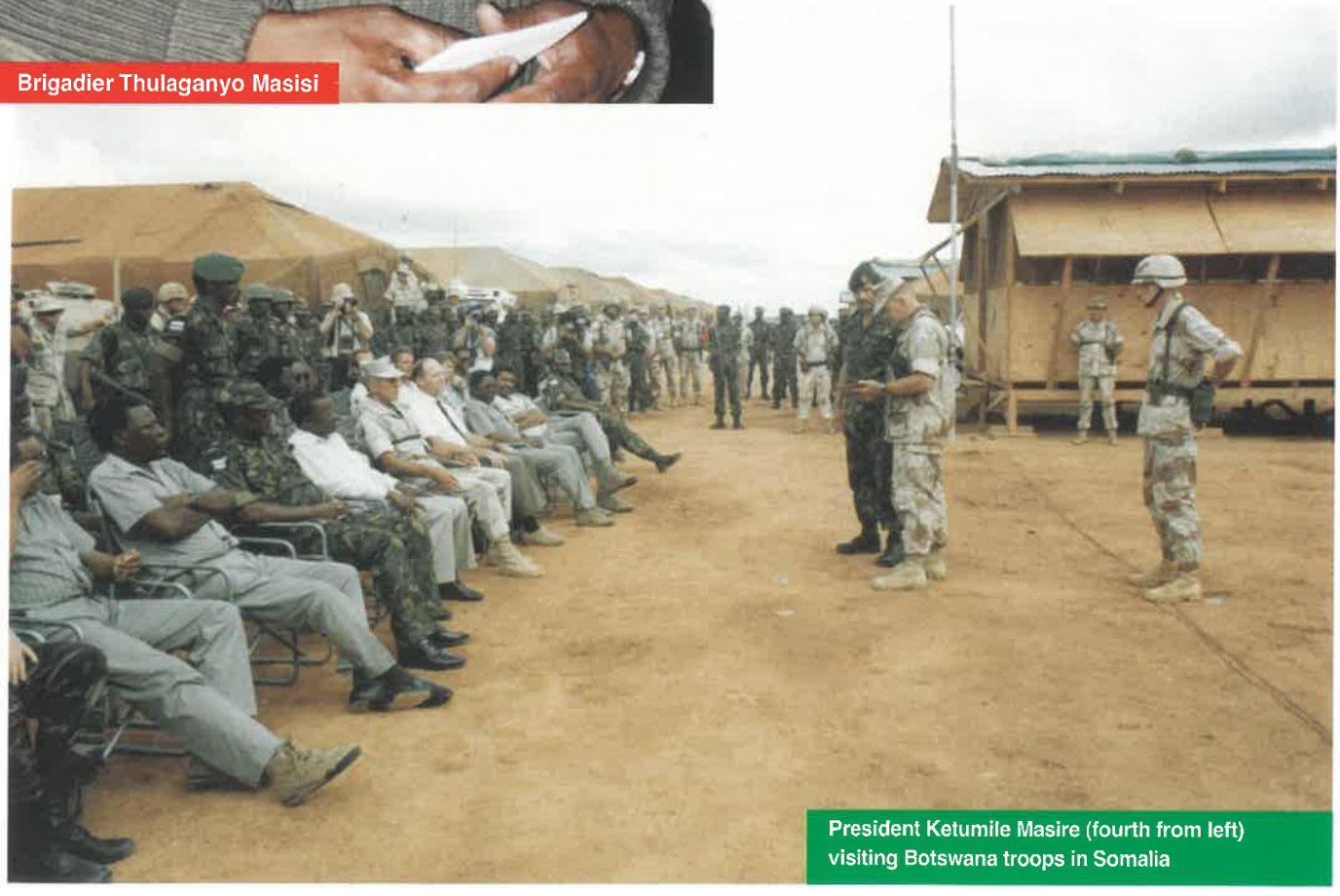
More BDF troops were sent on another UN peace-keeping operation in Mozambique.

Masisi was also in the thick of things during "Operation Boleas", an initiative by the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) to restore the rule of law in Lesotho after rioting that followed the announcement of election results.

The participating armies in "Operation Boleas" – BDF and South African National Defence Force – later retrained members of Lesotho Defence Force.

The BDF has also sent personnel in 1993 – 94 to Rwanda as observers in the UN peacekeeping mission at the end of a bloody genocide.

Other BDF members have served in the African Union Liaison Mission in Ethiopia/Eritrea, as well as in Sudan's region of Darfur. 30



President Ketumile Masire (fourth from left) visiting Botswana troops in Somalia

BDF in outreach projects

Handing of a house in Serowe

1996: BDF undertakes, 'Operation Save Sua,' where the army laid 90, 000 sandbags and 12 000 tyres to save the berm wall of Botswana Ash plant which was threatened by heavy floods

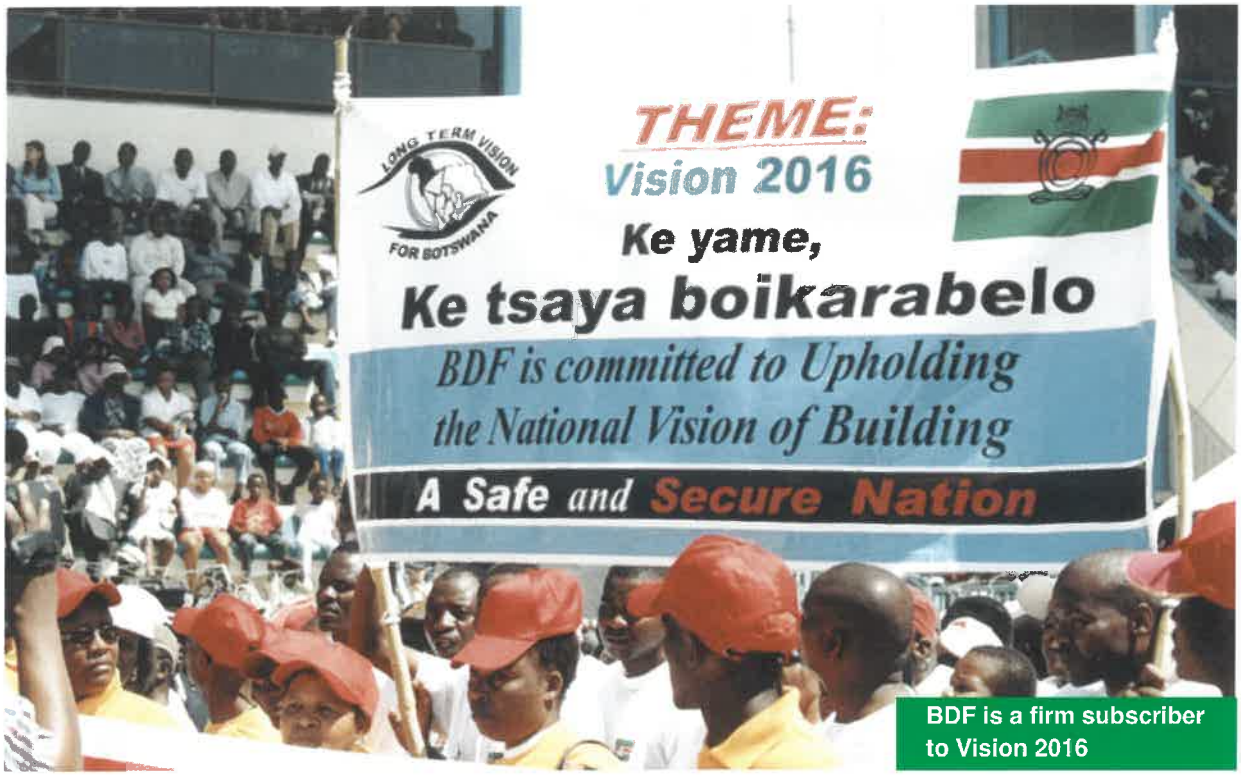
The all too familiar scene of Botswana Defence Force personnel undertaking community outreach projects has cemented the army's kind-hearted approach to helping those in need. Through its various units, BDF continues to contribute towards the achievement of the ideal enshrined in Vision 2016 of a "passionate, just and caring nation".

In undertaking community outreach projects, BDF first looks at the nature of the need, and then determines the form of contribution – which sometimes comes in the form of funds, equipment, or manpower to execute the work.

At the heart of its community outreach programme, the BDF aims at helping the underprivileged in the society. Most of the most high profile projects carried out are those where army units have provided shelter for the needy and vulnerable.

Since 2003, the officers and men of the Great North (2 Brigade) have built and handed over houses to destitute families in Francistown, Matsiloje, Mmadinare, Damchojenaa, Kobojango, and Phuduhudu.

The 205 Amour Regiment has built a three-roomed house and provided bedding for the 80-year-old man in 2003. The 205 Amour Regiment raised the money through concerts, including one in Gweta,



BDF is a firm subscriber to Vision 2016

for the house.

In 2006, the Corps of Engineers helped Sir Seretse Khama Junior Secondary School build a house for a destitute family. The project, which was conceived by the Gaborone West social workers, identified the family of a single mother of five who lived in shack. The Corps of Engineers assisted by providing manpower for the construction of the house. After completion, the house was handed over by Brigadier Mogamisi.

Officer Cadets, Class 29 of 2006 built a house for an elderly man in Palapye who looks after 13 grandchildren. The cadets also provided clothing, bedding and groceries for the family. Before the intervention of the Officer Cadets, the family members were all crammed in a small hut as their shelter. The house was handed over by Commander, Ground Forces Command, Major-General Pius Mokgware.

BDF soldiers in a litter picking exercise

Recruits Intake 56 started a unique community outreach programme in Mababe, known as Mababe Outreach Project. The Recruits Intake 56 built a recreational facility for the community.

In 2006, Recruits Intake 57 continued the Mababe Outreach Project, Phase II – building a library and furnishing it with computers. They also extended the fence to cover the library and the recreational facility.

Through the years, litter picking has been the hallmark of BDF community outreach programme. The campaign is often led by the high-ranking leaders of the army. In 205 Amour Regiment undertook a litter-picking expedition in Gweta. Many such campaigns have been embarked upon in many towns and villages across the country.

February **2006**: BDF rescue teams carried emergency rescue operations in Taung (near Ramotswa) after floods

BDF Bands in Concert

The Band Wing's mission is to train officers and men into professional musicians who will participate in the provision of music both during joyous and sad moments. These include state banquets, state visits, pass-out parades, ceremonial parades, funerals, institutional celebrations, independence celebrations and counter-poverty festivals.

In 1991, the concept of BDF Bands in Concert was conceived. The Bands in Concert was Lieutenant General Ian Khama's idea, who reasoned that the band could play a critical role in uplifting lives of some Batswana. It began in Gaborone under the theme of "Taking music to the people", with the primary focus being to raise funds for charitable organizations. Due to the expenses incurred in hosting the concert, it was decided to charge an entry fee to recover the costs, with the balance donated to charity.

BDF Bands in Concert has since grown to become the most popular shows in the country. Now the concert reaches 15 live performances, covering various genres – from classical to pop music. Traditional dance has been incorporated and is one of the mainstays of the BDF Bands in Concert.

The BDF Bands in Concert has grown in number, from 2 to 15 bands. Initially the entry fee was P5.00, but has now been raised to P30 for other venues, while Gaborone shows are charged P40.

Traditional dance features prominently on the annual BDF Ban concerts

Initially, all the money accrued was donated to the Botswana red Cross Society (BRCS). But since 1999, the band has been donating money to individual charitable organizations such as Cheshire Foundation, Mapoka Home Based Care, Central Association of Blind and Disabled People, Francistown District Commissioner's House of Orphans, Botswana Council of the Disabled, Somarelang Tikologo, Tutume Orphans and Day Care Centre, Mogorosi Junior Secondary School, Mothakola Primary School and Ramotswa School for the Deaf – amongst many others.

Kwasa kwasa dancers

On a rescue mission during floods

Rescue operations

Over the years, the BDF has assisted local authorities in times of national disasters. In 1995 BDF undertook major rescue missions during floods that hit major parts of the country.

In 1996 BDF members and equipment were deployed at Sua in "Operation Save Sua" to save the wall of Botswana Ash (Botash) plant, which was being threatened by heavy floods. BDF laid 90 000 sand bags and 12 000 tyres in the operation.

In the recent floods that hit Ramotswa and its surrounding areas in February 2006, BDF teams carried out relentless rescue missions. 30

Operation Save Sua

Inter-Units competitions

On the tracks

There is an alluring attraction between the army and sport. Brigadier George Tlhalerwa says the two are inseparable. "The army and sport are very close," he quips.

Since inception, BDF has been led by men who saw the value of sport in moulding troops – physically and mentally. It is an enduring legacy that still stands today. All the commanders have played a pivotal role in ensuring that sport stays central to the life of the troops.

With varying degrees, they have propelled the growth of the athletes and provided an enabling environment in the form of facilities and time to ensure that troops remain fit and active.

The army has also built the human resource base to manage sport development through facilities and training. Through the sport development fund, which draws a minimum amount from salaries of all soldiers irrespective of rank, BDF has been able to fund sport development, within its ranks and beyond.

Captain Lesika "Siks" Keatlholetswe talks of the great love for sport the first commander, Lieutenant General Mompati Merafhe had. "He would scold you if he thought you did not give your best," Keatlholetswe remembers his early days at BDF.

General Merafhe went on to serve for over a decade as the chairperson of the Botswana National Sport Council (BNSC), a record that is still to be broken. The second commander, Lieutenant General Seretse Khama Ian Khama, is a fitness fanatic who had supported BDF teams passionately. He is president of Mogoditshane Fighters and patron to the Botswana Football Association.

Lieutenant General Louis Fisher, the third commander, was a keen basketball player and martial arts practitioner. The current commander, Lieutenant General Tebogo Masire, is a regular spectator at BDF XI games.

Olympian Wilson Theleso says the army's founding officers such as Lieutenant Colonel Mpale, Colonel Lekgaba and Colonel Ratshipa had passion for sport and rallied their troops through games. "These men loved sport and they understood that sport was an essential ingredient in building the discipline of soldiers," adds another BDF Olympian, Mbiganyi Thee.

Athletes such as Keitirile Keitirile, Kgomotso Balotlhanyi and Bothobotsile Bogopa performed because the leadership saw the central role that sport plays in the army. At BDF, they built them all – individual and teams sports. Beside luminary athletes like Andrew Dobolo, boxer Elliot Mmila, Million Masumbika, Theleso and Thee, BDF has built colossal teams, such as BDF 6, the many times winners of the

BDF XI's coaches Lieutenant Colonel **Stanley Tshosane**, **Major David Bright** and **Captain Lesika Keatlholetswe** have coached the Zebras

Three players from BDF XI were in the Zebras squad that faced Burundi in the African Nations Cup qualifier at the national stadium in March 2007. They are goalkeeper **Modiri Marumo**, defender **Mompati Thuma** and midfielder **Nelson Gabolwelwe**

Some of the sports available to BDF soldiers include volleyball, rugby, and weightlifting

volleyball tournaments.

Softball, netball, and bodybuilding are some of the BDF sport codes that have registered great success in national and international competitions.

Athletes from BDF have represented the country at many international competitions across different sporting codes.

The army has not only produced great athletes and conquering teams. It has also been a great developer of administrators.

Through concerted training and development, the army has produced sport leaders who have gone to serve beyond the call of duty at crucial national engagements.

The list is long. Retired Major General Bakwena Oitsile has served the bodies of football (super league committee) and Botswana Netball Association (BNA). Major Botsang Tshenyego has served as president at Botswana Tennis Association (BTA), and Ipolokeng Ramatshaba has done a sterling job as the publicity man at Botswana Athletics Association (BAA).

Brigadier Tlhalerwa served Botswana Softball Association for 15 years in various capacities, including as president of the national association and manager of the national team.

Million Maswimbika has been with the national karate body since the 1980s.

The following are some of the sons – serving or retired – who have sacrificed their time and talents to nurture sport development in the BDF and beyond:

Brigadier George Tlhalerwa

Brigadier George Tlhalerwa's involvement goes far beyond the sporting fraternity. To explain what drives him, he draws a moving example. "To see a teardrop of happiness falling down the cheek of an old woman after building her a house; that is what I call fulfillment," Tlhalerwa says. He is explaining why he volunteers so much time helping those less privileged in the society.

Tlhalerwa is currently the vice-president of Botswana Red Cross Society (BRCS). He came to the BRCS as deputy to the long-term president, the late Lady Ruth Khama and after she passed away, Tlhalerwa deputized Lady Barbara Mogae for a year before Dr Nomsa Mbere took over the presidency.

Before switching to BRCS, Tlhalerwa had served softball as a loyal servant for many years. He first came into contact with softball as a student at Madiba Secondary School. Like many of his generation, he was introduced to the sport by American Peace Corps volunteers, who served as teachers. He fell in love with the game.

"Softball is based more on tactics and strategy than on sheer contact. The attacking team bets, while the defending team fields," he explains.

Tlhalerwa found softball to be, "a joyful sport". He describes himself as having been an "average player", and he gives this as an explanation for having had a relatively short playing stint.

Tlhalerwa joined BDF in 1983, playing for BDF IX for about three years, before he switched to management, where he felt he could make more impact.

His assessment is that in the many roles, coach and manager of the team, he discharged his mandate with distinction. "In those 12 years that I was at the helm of BDF IX softball team, I won all the trophies on offer," he says.

Softball is a team sport and Tlhalerwa is happy that he built great teams. At times, about 80 percent of the national team players came from BDF IX.

"When Botswana went to compete at the Philippines, 75 percent of the team came from BDF IX. One of our players, Pako Plaatjie was included in that tournament's Planet 9 team. That means he was among the world's best nine players," Tlhalerwa explains.

Besides better facilities, Tlhalerwa says his teams ticked because of better management skills. He emphasises that sport in Botswana is played for recreational purposes, and thus ordering people around does not always work.

"I had to balance enjoyment and results, while at the same time appreciating that the players were making a great sacrifice," Tlhalerwa says.

Brigadier George Tlhalerwa

Amongst some of the most talented players he has worked with are Plaatjie, Themba Johnson, Tirelo "Scania" Mukokomani, City Bodirilwe and Galeyo Bakwena.

After dominating the domestic scene, he offered his service to the nation, and from 1988 to 1993, he was national team manager. He also had a two-year stint as vice president of Botswana Softball Association (BSA) to Andrew Mokoto. Tlhalerwa served as BSA president from 1997 to 2000.

"I gave softball 15 years of my quality time, 10 of them at executive committee level," Tlhalerwa says as he looks back. He reasons that it is vital for old hands to move on and allow younger people with better ideas to take over.

However, he has not completely severed all ties with softball. He is part of an old generation of players and administrators that are constantly called for advice. Exiting the softball scene provided him with ample time that he has used to great effect at BRC.

"The scope of BRCS is much wider than that of softball. I could be helping out in Kaudwane or anywhere else in the country," he says. He says he uses his time profitably, and although it is a great sacrifice on the part of his family, it is worth it.

Tlhalerwa is also a patron of Maun Rehabilitation and Counseling Centre.

Ogopotse Godirwang, **Sehularo Pelekekae**, **Matimbe Mmese**, **Christopher Mbaakanyi** as well as the late **Mmoloki Ramanoko**, and **Rodgers "Director" Chikumbudzi**, are some of the BDF XI players who donned the national colours in the 1980s and 1990s.

Major David Bright won three league titles in a row (1999 –2002) with Mogoditshane Fighters, making him one of the most successful local coaches.

Lesika Keatlholetswe

Lesika 'Siks' Keatlholetswe credits his long association with football to two major factors: Botswana Defence Force (BDF) and Botswana Football Association (BFA).

Now a retired captain, Keatlholetswe says he owes his current position – Technical Director of BFA – to massive investment by the BDF on his development. "BDF sacrificed time and resources to develop me. I attribute all my life's success to the army," he says.

As a youngster growing up in Tonota, Keatlholetswe idolized Tonota Blue Birds, but he would make his name as player and coach at BDF XI in the 1980s. At Shashe River School he played for school team and would idolize Samuel Sono, the Swaneng Hill School goalkeeper who would carve a legacy for himself at Township Rollers, before going on to found FC Satmos.

It's been a long journey that began as a player for Police XI, the team that members of Police Mobile Unit (PMU) played for. That was before the advent of the army.

"We played for Police XI since PMU was part of the police force and when BDF was formed in 1977, I was among BDF XI's first crop of players," Keatlholetswe recalls. For over two decades, Colonel Sello Katse was the main driving force behind the team.

BDF XI was then campaigning in the Second Division and relied on the likes of Bruce Tlherego, Peter Baker, Johnson "Zero" Moruakgomo, Magwegwe Basiamang, Colonel Phometsi, Blessing Motlhabani and Shoe Ramosesane.

In 1980, BDF was promoted to the first division, alongside Lobatse's Extension Gunners. In 1981, under the guidance of Tizzah Sekgaphane, BDF won the league, their first of the seven titles. The only team with more league titles is Township Rollers with nine.

Of all his great memories as a player he remembers coming off the bench to score against his longtime hero, Sono in a league game. "I just unleashed a speculative, but powerful strike from about 25 metres. My teammates were screaming for a pass, but when the ball sailed past Sono, everyone was elated. BDF went on to win 4-1 and from then onwards, I scored a few more goals against Sono, who together with Saxton Kowa were the best keepers at the time," Keatlholetswe recalls.

In 1981, BDF sent Keatlholetswe to his first coaching course, conducted by the German Bernard Struen. From then onwards, still as a player, Keatlholetswe attended many courses. The most prestigious one is the much-cherished diploma in coaching from the University of Leipzig, which has produced many reputable coaches, such as his predecessor at BFA, Ben Koufie of Ghana.

Keatlholetswe rewarded the army with league titles in 1988 and 1989. BDF XI won the league and Lion Cup in 1989, and the Coca-Cola Cup in 1998.

"In my long association with the team, I have had the privilege to work with some of the most talented players such as Pro Ollyn, Felix Chalwe, Abram Mubanga, Stanley Tshosane, Rio Maswabi, Ogopotse Godirwang, Director Chikumbudzi and Macro Makubate," Keatlholetswe says.

He then served as national team coach for a short stint. In his major assignment, the Zebras drew 0-0 with Lesotho away, but lost 4-1 at home.

Keatlholetswe now holds a degree in physical education from the university of Botswana and is currently reading for a master's degree in sport psychology at the same institution. He has evolved to become one of the army's ambassadors and his word on the game is never taken lightly.

Facts on BDF XI

Founded in 1977

Registered with Botswana National Football Association (BNFA) in 1978
Played in second division in 1979
Promoted to first division in 1980

Founders:

Lt. Gen. Mompati Merafhe (Life Patron)
Lt. Gen. Seretse Khama Ian Khama (Life President)
Maj. Gen. Bakwena Oitsile (Chairman)
Late Col. H. Rankhudu (Manager)
Col. S. Katse (Coach)

Present leadership

Lt. Gen. T. H. C. Masire (Patron)
Maj. Gen. J. G. Tlhokwane (President)
Maj. Gen. O. B. Tiroyamodimo (Vice-President)
Brigadier L. Motsumi (Chairman)

League honours:

1981	Castle League champions
1988	Castle League champions
1989	Castle League champions
1991	Castle League champions
1997	Castle League champions
2002	St. Louis League champions
2004	St. Louis League champions

Cup honours

1987, 1988, 1989	Lion Cup winners
1998	Coca-Cola Challenge Cup winners
2001, 2002	Independence Cup winners
2004	Coca-Cola Challenge Cup winners

CAF Participation

BDF XI began representing Botswana in the continental games in 1982, losing to 2-1 aggregate score against Dynamos of Zimbabawe. Ever since then, BDF XI has been a regualar participant, playing the likes of Sotema (Madagascar, 1989), Matlala (Lesotho, 1990), Orlando Pirates (South Africa, 1999) Simba (Tanzania, 2003), FC Lupop (DRC).

BDF XI players (1970s – 90s) who played for the National Team

Christopher Pro Ollyn, Stanley Tshosane, Shadrack 'Rio' Maswabi, Micro Makubate, Ogopotswe Godirwang, late Director Chikumbudzi, the late Zero Mminakgomo, Christopher Mbaakanyi, Peter Mabile, Joe Black, Felix Chalwe, the late Zarra Ramanoko, Sehularo Pelekekae, Louis Setshwane

Present BDF XI players in the National Team

Modiri Marumo, Donald Thobega, Nelson 'Viola' Gabolwelwe, Mompoloki Mogofu, Mpho Mabogo, Mompati Thuma

Coaches:

Col S. Katse, Tizza Sekgaphane, the late Felix Chalwe, late Itayi, Chieza, Six Keatlholetswe, Director Chikumbudzi, Dick Chama and Stanley Hunter Tshosane. Keatlholetswe and Tshosane have coached at national level.

Corporal Modiri Marumo has been the Zebras captain since 2003

Million Masumbika

Million Masumbika

Million Tabalume Masumbika's name is synonymous with karate in Botswana. He was lured from football to karate after watching actor Bruce Lee's antics on an old black and white television set.

He first set base at BDF karate club at the Village, known as Gaborone Village Karate Club (GVKC), and transformed it into a formidable club that swept all tournaments.

"At the time, I had three great karatekas, whom I called the three amigos: Alpheous Matlhekga, Biki Bushumane and Carter Mosetlha. When we contested at tournaments, I would open, then Mosetlha would come second and Bushumane third. Whoever were fourth and fifth would find the contest already won," Masumbika explains.

They won three major tournaments in a row, but his comrades left the sport at brown belt, leaving Masumbika to soldier on.

As his reputation as a trainer ballooned, he found many youngster lining up to enroll at GVKC. In 1992, he went to Glen Valley and continued to spread karate.

Soon, he was appointed coordinator of all BDF karate clubs. This called for a lot of travelling, as he had to tour all the BDF clubs countrywide. At national level, Masumbika arrived in 1989 as an additional member of Botswana Karate Association and raced through all the structures.

"I was the first person from karate to be nominated for the then Sefalana/Botswana National Sport Council (BNSC) Awards in 1986," he recalls. He has served the country as national team player, national team captain as well as national team coach. In 1995 he was coach at the All Africa Games in Zimbabwe and the World Karate Championship in Sun City, a year later.

Due to lack of qualified personnel, Masumbika has been undertaking many coaching courses, starting in 1996. He is currently the Secretary of the Union of Referees for Africa. Masumbika says all his accolades are due to the army.

"Karate is part of me. The army built me, gave the courage and opportunities to attend many course that have developed me," he says.

He flashes a smile and adds that; "I also have to give back, both to the army and the nation. Upon my return from the many courses I attended, I have shared with others."

Masumbika is part of the people who helped propel the growth of karate – both technical and administrative in the country. "Through my many travels and connections, I have helped bring experts to train and upgrade the locals."

He points to household names like Thabiso Ramaretlwaneng and Andrew Dobolo as some of the giants he helped unearth. He trained Dobolo as a child, and has seen him grow.

He also happens to be the pioneer of Kofukan karate style in Botswana. Today the style is among the most widely practised styles in the country.

He has risen from many disappointing setbacks associated with sport, such as his torn hamstring muscle in 1987. That was the first and only time he ever thought of quitting. But he refused to give in to the thought.

Having been in the sport for so long, he believes he is about to step from administrative duties, especially since he has been in the national executive for 18 years. As for training, it is a lifetime commitment. "As you grow older, you train for spiritual fulfillment," he explains.

BDF XI's **Shadrack "Rio" Maswabi** played for the Zebras in their 2-0 win over Malawi during Botswana's 20th anniversary celebrations in 1986.

Blue Angles is the name of Thebephatshwa Airbase softball team. The Selebi-Phikwe side is known as Carats

Andrew Dobolo

The karateka, Andrew Dobolo has been described in many sporting circles as a goldsmith – a reference to the many gold medals he won at crucial international tournaments. He has won so many medals that although he values them all, it's the gold medals from major tournaments that he cherishes more.

Dobolo grew up at SSKB camp, where he stayed with his brother and developed interest in two sports codes: karate and football.

He used to alternate between the two, but gradually karate gained his undivided attention because it offered him a chance to go on trips, especially international ones. Behind Dobolo's rapid progress was Million Masumbika, who recognized his talent early and groomed him.

At 17, Dobolo was in the national team that went to the London World Cup in 1997. "In the team, I was the best performer but I was knocked out in the semi-final by the guy who went on to win the gold. I was disappointed, but I picked myself up." He won the gold at the 1998 Zone VI championship in the over 80kg category, replacing the respected Otto Tafa who competed at the under 80kg berth.

Another disappointment came at the All Africa Games (AAG) in Johannesburg where Dobolo tore a muscle, but still competed.

Soon he picked up his game. To date, Dobolo has never lost a Zone VI fight. In 2001 he brought two gold medals from Madagascar's Africa Cup tournament. Another gold medal followed from the British Open Golden League in 2003, as well as at the AAG in Abuja, Nigeria.

In 2004, he went to the Karate World Cup in Mexico and won another gold medal. In 2005, Dobolo went to represent Africa at Duisburg, Germany and it was at that tournament that he was advised to train in Europe.

After gaining the eighth position out of 16 contestants, he realized that to improve further he needed to compete regularly in the European circuit – the Karate Golden League.

Dobolo, who works as a sport officer at SSKB, was sent to Norway with Tom Keoagile and the duo competed in many meetings, such as London and Milan.

Locally, Dobolo is a generously decorated sport personality. He is the 1998 Best karateka, 2001 Best karateka, 2004 Chairperson Award recipient, 2004 Sportsman of the Year, 2005 Sportsman of the year and 2005 Sport Personality of the year. His name has been gazetted for next year's presidential honours.

The holder of the second den black belt, Dobolo says BDF has remained steadfast in his progress. "There are training facilities, exposure to training and financial support that the army has helped with. I can only thank the institution by being the best I can be," Dobolo says.

Andrew Dobolo

"The government of Botswana is not asking BDF IX players who have played for the softball national team include **City Bodirilwe**, **Sam Lebodi**, **Themba Johnson**, **Gazo Osupile**, **Tirelo Mukokomani**, **Shadrack Moloi**, **Pako Plaatjie**, and **Galeyo Bakwena**

Colonel Edwin Senai has served as a FIFA referee and has officiated at a number of high profile international matches

Wilson Theleso

In May 1978, just over a year after BDF's formation, Wilson Boiki Theleso joined the army.

He soon turned himself into one of the most well-known and revered athletes of his generation.

His athletics exploits earned him the name, "Concorde" after the supersonic fast earoplane.

At primary school, he ran both 800m and 1500m for his school. The best was yet to come and when he joined BDF it offered him to exploit his God-given gift to the maximum.

Theleso first made his name in the BDF Inter Units games in his first two years, and by 1980 he made his debut at a major marathon, the Holiday Inn sponsored 42.2km race, where he finished 13.

He was posted to E-Company, and it was there, under the encouragement of the leadership, that he started contesting in regional competitions, before maturing into an international athlete. After the Zimbabwean independence, Theleso went to compete at the Pro Nutro sponsored race in Harare.

In 1983, he went under the wing of coach Tony Lett and Emerson Lenong as his manager. Theleso went to the World Championships in Helsinki, Finland with Joe Ramotshabi in 1983. He also made the Botswana team to Los Angels Olympics in 1984.

From then onwards, Theleso toured the world, representing BDF and the country at major meetings. Though he enjoyed many travels, he describes athletics as, "a highly individualistic and painful endeavour".

"I think the greatest mistake that I did was to compete in many different events without specializing. I also should not have started with marathons which are more grueling and punishing," he says.

Looking back, he says maybe he would have had more success if he had stuck with only 5000m and 10 000m.

then understood and appreciated the sport, and knew that, "running was not a pleasurable activity." It was only after an encounter with Tony Lett that he started cutting down on the many challenging tracks that are the hallmarks of marathons.

Theleso says one major reason he ran marathons was that since their international calendar is always packed it offered more travel, which he loved as a young person.

He says the fear of losing was his greatest motivator. "I could not begin to think of how I would explain my loss to my seniors who had so much confidence in me. In simple terms, I had to justify the time I spent training by producing good results," Theleso says.

For national championships, Theleso says he would warm up on his own and upon appearing at the track, "everyone would know that I was around and whoever wanted to win must contend with me – civilians or soldiers".

Theleso says he has ushered a new crop of athletes into the sport. In 1992 he was part of the team that included Reuben Rathedi, Lesedinyana Lekgetho and Kabo Gabaseme at the World Marathon relay in Greece.

Gabaseme would go on to become a major feature in athletics for the next 15 years. He recalls the 1995 World Cross Country Championship where, his teammates, Zachariah Ditetso and Kabo Gabaseme froze in the chill of the English weather.

"With my many years of travel and experience I just bubbled with energy, much to their surprise," he says. In 1998, Theleso went to Zimbabwe to compete at the Zone VI marathon, his last race.

"I ended where I began. I did not get involved with veteran marathons because I had been competing for 18 years and my body needed a rest," he says.

Theleso geared for S. Korea

By Abraham Motsokono

AFTER his glorious victory during the BDF Interunit athletic competitions held at the National stadium over the weekend when he was crowned "1988 best athlete of the day", Botswana's international Wilson Theleso is poised to take further strides towards global prominence in the Olympic games due to be held in Seoul, South Korea in September.

After scooping six trophies, the softspoken long middle distance runner of the 5000 and 10 000 metres confidently said in an exclusive interview with The Gazette: "I feel very proud of my victory and I am ready and busy preparing for the Olympics in South Korea".

Theleso has represented Botswana in several international games including the Commonwealth games in 1982 when he featured prominently by emerging number 20 in a marathon race which had attracted many participants from other countries of Africa.

He also featured in the all Africa athletic competitions in 1987 which were held in Nairobi, Kenya.

Asked about the prospects of his performance in South Korea, Theleso said: "There is nothing that is going to stop me from doing my best in the games as long as I will be fit by then. I know there is going to be tough competition, but I feel confident that I am going to perform good this time".

Asked whom he rates the best athlete in Botswana, Theleso said "Mbiganyi Thee is the man. Thee runs the 1500 metres race.

Other winners of the day were the 200 metre runner Sunday Maweni and others.

Mbiganyi Thee

At best, Mbiganyi Thee says his involvement in athletics at BDF was slow and laboured. "I was very reluctant to take part," Thee says. "Infact, I did not want anything to do with running."

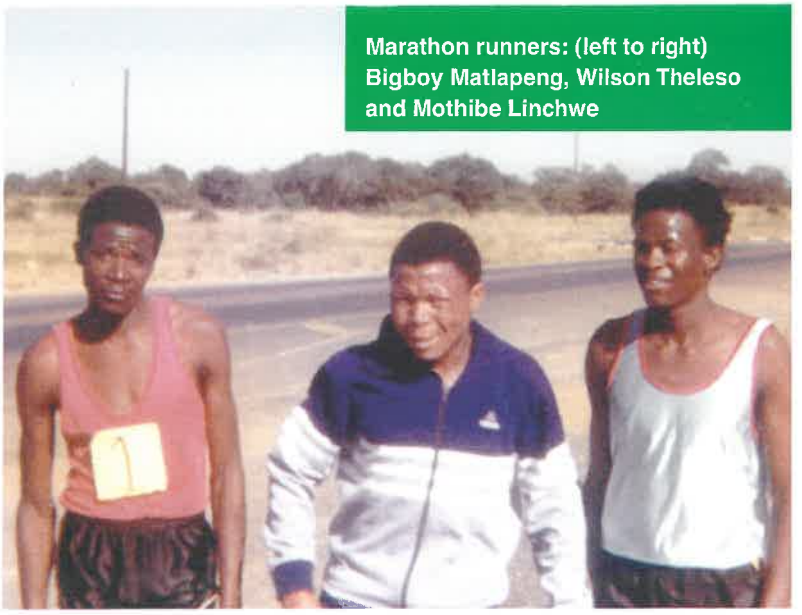
He was urged on to develop his talent by people who knew his potential such as Brigadier Hengari, Colonel Sello Katse, Brigadier Letsogile Motsumi as well as Thee's cousin, Major General Bakwena Oitsile.

But Thee continued to drag his feet, choosing, instead, to concentrate on core military duties. One day, he found himself before Lieutenant Mpale, who was unhappy at Thee's unwillingness to run. It was in 1983.

In the same year, Thee went on to win at the Inter Units Competitions and he was promptly transferred to E-Company, the then home of BDF sporting greats. "In 1984, I decided to start running for God," Thee muses.

Missing the 1984 Los Angels Olympics was a great motivation. Thee decided to train hard so that he could beat all those who went to the games.

Mbiganyi Thee and Wilson Theleso



Marathon runners: (left to right) Bigboy Matlapeng, Wilson Theleso and Mothibe Linchwe

As the saying goes, the rest is history. Thee's name was once in every sportswriter's lips. He has represented Botswana in countries such as Zambia, Zimbabwe, Angola, Kenya, Mauritius, Italy, the United States of America, Greece, South Korea, England, New Zealand, Scotland, Spain, Canada, and Germany.

He started off with marathons, but as time went on, his coach Tony Lett advised him to concentrate on 800metres and 1500metres, the two events that he got to be known for.

An officer on secondment from the British army, Captain Meyers, realized Thee's great potential in Thee and organised him sponsorship from BM Engineering.

Through Meyers' efforts, Thee spent time training in different racetracks in Britain, which Thee believes led to his marked improvement.

Of the many travels, Thee remembers the Grand Prix at Birmingham in 1990, where he set the 800m national record of 1:45. The record stood for more than 10 years and was broken by Glody Dube at Sydney Olympics.

At that meeting, he competed against the Kenyans, Robert Kibert and William Tanui, who became medalists at the Barcelona Olympics in 1992.

"I have competed against the best in both 800metres and 1500metres. In the semi-finals of the Commonwealth Games at Auckland, New Zealand, I ran next to Sebastian Coe, the then world record holder, and John Walker. Unfortunately, I failed to reach the finals by just one athlete," Thee says.

The mid 1990s ushered a new era in athletics, but Thee says fatigue and injuries had taken toll on him. He had been competing competitively for more than a decade.

After a lengthy injury, he planned a great comeback, but his body did not respond the way he was used to.

"I then decided to quit, for I did not want to endure the frustration of losing," Thee says.

From then onwards, he put his energy to training younger athletes, such as Olerile Modisaotsile and Benjamin Keleketu.

THE MAN WHO'LL HEAD BOTSWANA ARMY

Major General Merafhe —tough and disciplined

By Batshane Ndaba

The man who has been appointed to spearhead Botswana's Defence Force, Major General Mompati Merafhe has expressed confidence of developing the army even to an extent of dealing with forces which may be numerically superior.

"I hope to transform and enlarge the paramilitary Police Mobile Unit (PMU), the Defence Force's base, into a fighting force which will deal effectively with any external force," he says. He is optimistic that he will have a good beginning in that the PMU officers, who are already trained men, have agreed to transfer to the Defence Force.

He goes on, "Infact with effect from the date of my appointment, April 18, the PMU started their operations as soldiers along our border" he says. On the other hand, the Commander explains, those officers who won't join the Defence Force will render their services in the general duties police.

The 40-year-old former deputy police commissioner discloses that a second recruitment for the army will be undertaken next month. He dismisses allegations that people with higher academic qualifications are not recruited.

"These people are also recruited although after their training they are given higher responsibilities. We have just stipulated that Standard Seven is the minimum qualification required," he explains

Commander Merafhe notes that an intensive training programme for the soldiers will be undertaken both in and outside Botswana. "It should be realised that the army calls for more training than for instance, that needed for paramilitary forces," he says.

He emphasises that discipline is an essentail element for any army establishment, and "I shall call for the highest degree of discipline."

In a story headlined 'Botswana general without an army' the April 19,'Rand Daily Mail' newspaper describes Commader Merafhe as "a tough disciplinarian who has had intensive overseas training." He has actually had such training overseas, three sessions in Britain to be exact.

And for the court marshalls who

On the question of equipment and other requirements for the army, Commander Merafhe, who is now made more conspicuous by his military uniform, says that "we already have some equipment and what remains is for us to get some-more." He however, could not comment on whether Botswana would respond to the Soviet Union's recent announcement of her preparedness to arm Botswana forces as a result of continued Rhodesian incursions into Botswana.

The Minister of Public Service and Information Daniel Kwelagobe this week disclosed that Botswana will buy arms from any friendly country regardless of ideological leanage.

The Commander also says that a proper uniform, some of which will be used during ceremonial occasions, will be obtained for the army. "We do not have this kind of uniform yet" he points out.

He says that the responsibility entrusted upon him, that of laying down the administrative machinery for getting the Defence Force off ground, is a challenging one.

Major General Merafhe says "we hope to live up to the nation's expectations. We will have limitations because of our country's restricted resources," he says.

The Commander says that the army officer's salaries will not be different from those of members of the Public Service, although they will have other fringe benefits like free accommodation, water and others. When the President addressed the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) conference over the Easter weekend in Mochudi he told his audience in part:

"We will have to find the fund to develop and maintain this force and this calls for a clear sense of responsibility on all of us who have become used to clamouring for more pay and privileges at every turn. We either pool our efforts to strive for a secure future or we perish."

Major General Mompati Merafhe ....tough disciplinarian ....", be developed to deal effectively with any external th

Looking at his work in the police force, one sees a Major General Merafhe who has had a successful career. Although he jokingly says he does not have any academic qualifications he can boast of, he had on occasions been promoted twice in one year.

In 1970 he was prmoted from Inspector to Assistant Superintendent in April but in October of the same year, he was elevated to Superintendent. He was promoted to Assistant Police Commissioner in February 1971 and before the end of the year, in September to be exact, he rose to Deputy Commisioner of Police, a post held until his latest appointment.

He vividly remembers joi Botswana Police on May 1, started corespondence st "but because of duty com I could not finish them

Major General Merafhe Serowe and savs he com "fairly small but well-kn ily." He is married with five He was appointed Comr the Defence Force on Apri President Sir Seretse Kha law to set up the army wa in the last session of Parli will appoint officers from of "Private" to "Major President will appoint of the rank of "Major."

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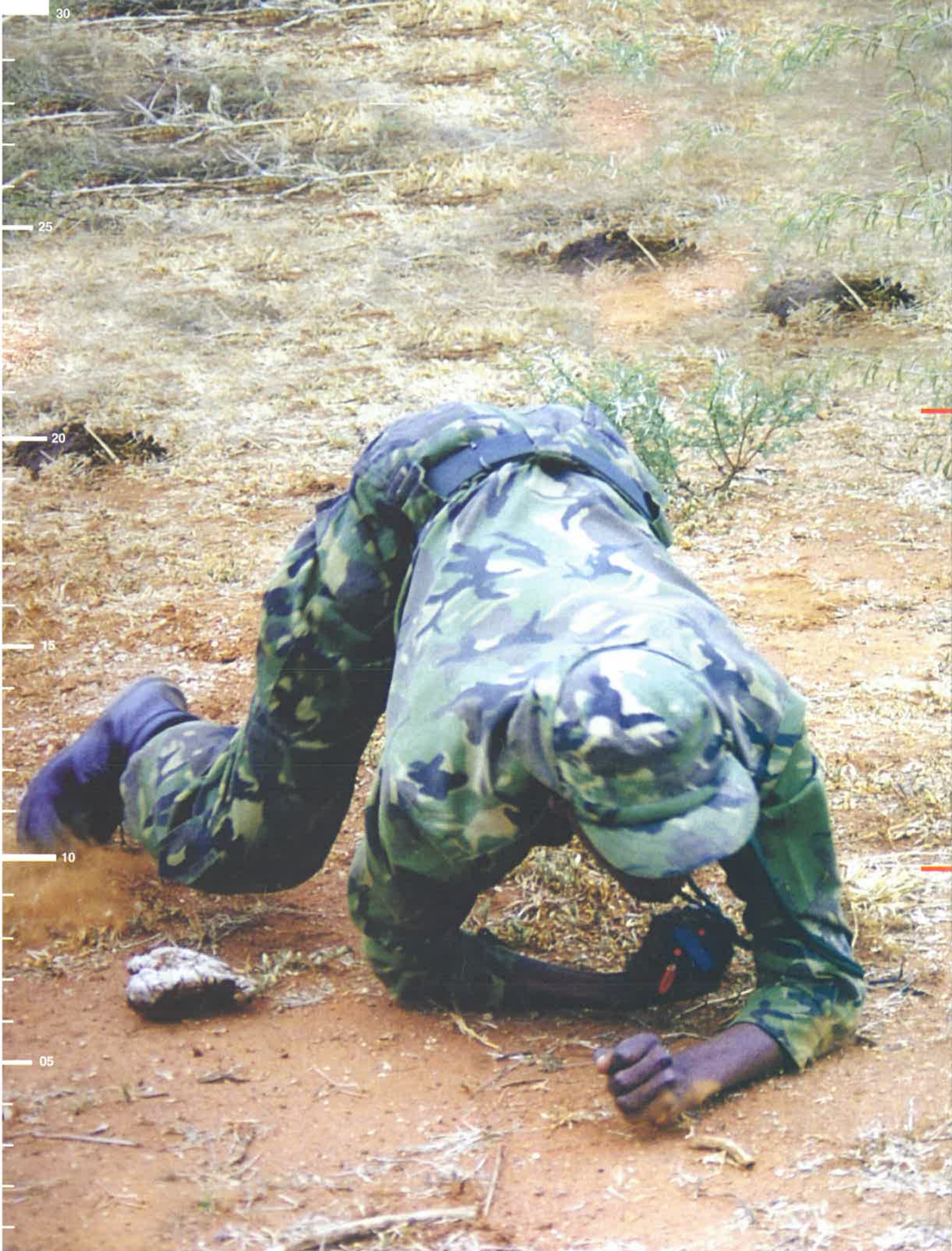
PRESIDENT GETS EDUCATI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